MAHIMA GOSAIN

Founder of The Mahima Cult

His Life And Thought



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MAHIMA PRAKASHAN
BHUBANESWAR

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APPENDIX

PART I

MAHIMA GOSAIN
(as described by Mahima followers)

Mahima Gosain, founder of Mahima cult left no account of his own life and of the Mahima faith. Dr. Mayadhar Mansingh feels that Mahima Gosain was an illiterate man, but he was one of the most daring thought leaders of India. He speaks of the Founder of the cult as follows -

" The unfavourable environment out of which this iconoclast and heretic sprang up, and the success with which he tried to establish a new moral order on earth through self-culture and ethical discipline, sternly eschewing the worship of any external object, make this obscure, illiterate man out of the jungle-lands of Orissa, one of the most daring thought leaders of India".

Historical records do not tell us much about the exact date of birth of Mahima Gosain nor the full detailed out lines of his earlier life. There are more of legends concerning these than accurate, historically verifiable or determind facts. Some of the facts, however, have been echoed in the writings of Bhima Bhoi, the great exponent of Mahima Religion. The advantage that he enjoyed was that not only he had Darshan of the Guru but also came in close contact with his Guru Mahima Gosain. His writings are therefore, the only original source materials available regarding Mahima Gosain and Mahima cult.

But the legendry story created by the followers of Mahima cult is as follows -

Sri S.Nath has written in his book "Mahima Dharmadhara," Page 4 as follows -

" It is believed that He (Mahima Gosain) was in the Himalayas living on wind only over centuries and revealed himself in the then crowded place, i.e. Puri."

The founder of Mahima Dharma or Alekh Dharma is known as 'Mahima Gosain' hailed from the Himalayas and journeying through Gaya and other States arrived at Puri in 1826 A.D.

According to Biswanath Baba who has written the history of Mahima Dharma, "Mahima Gosain was an incarnation of Param-Brahma and had spent his life in the Himalayas before making his appearance at Puri. What he did in the Himalayas is not known. His real name, age, parentage and his place of birth are shrouded in mystrey."

It is, however, claimed by the followers of Mahima Cult that Mahima Gosain is himself Alekh Swami. He is Parama-Brahma residing in the great void.

While at Puri, Mahima Gosain was called 'Dhulia Gosain' as he used to lie on dust on the main road or Bada Danda. He would seldom speak. The few auspicious utterances made to others generally came true. He had matted hair on his head and saffron-coloured loin cloth round his waist. He was staying in a cave called 'Arka Gumpha' at Puri.

During the period of his stay at Puri, he was invited to participate in discussion on the nature of Brahama at the Mukti Mandap Sabha. He had put forth the theory of advaitabada before the association of learned men in the Puri temple.

He spent 12 years in and around Puri and was called 'Nirahari Baba' as he lived on water only.

Then he left Puri and went to Kapilas hills near Dhenkanal in 1838 and meditated for 24 years. During the first twelve years he lived on fruits which were supplied to him from the forest. At that time he was called Phalahari Baba. The next

12 years he lived on milk which was supplied by Raja Bhagirathi Mahendra Bahadur of Dhenkanal and was called 'Kshirahari Baba'.

Mahima Gosain attained Siddhi in the year 1862 and started preaching his new religion, i.e., Mahima or Alekh religion after attaining siddhi in Kapilas Hill.

He preached his religion in the districts of Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam and in the feudatory States of Dhenkanal, Athgarh, Hindol, Boudh, Sonepur as well as in the districts of Sambalpur, Angul. He collected a large number of disciples all over Orissa.

He established a number of centres of Mahima Cult known as Mahima Ashrama and Alekh Tungi.

He recruted 92 sanyasis from Balkala panthi of whom 64 sanyasis were declared siddha. Likewise he recruted 60 sanyasis from Kaupin Panthi of whom 34 sanyasis were declared siddha as mentioned in "Satya Mahima Dharma Sankhipta Itihas."

In 1874, Mahima Gosain realised that his time to go back to the void was near. He gave up his mortal body in the month of phalgun of 1876 A.D.



FOUNDER'S LIFE (MAHIMA GOSAIN)

By Dr.(Miss) A. Eschmann

According to the statements of Mahima Dharmins, the founder of the sect Mahima or Alekha Gosvami entered Orissa in 1826.

For the teachings of the sect, Mahima Svami was no human being, but rather one not born out of a mother's womb,. (ayonisambhuta), a pure incarnation of the Mahima (radiance, glory) of Sunya Anadi Bhrahma who came to this earth in the Himalayas, turned later to Utkal, the holiest land of India, and settled down on Kapilas Mountain at Dhenkanal under the shelter of the snake God (Naga).

There, so continues the official biography, he lived only on water (Jalahari Gosai), for twelve years, without indicating his true nature. After the expiry of this period, he accepted his first disciple, initially called Jagannath, and named him Vasudeva (the name Vasudeve has been used in place of Govinda). According to the teaching of the sect, he was the God Jagannatha Himself who was the first to know of the advent of Mahima Gosvami because of his good karma: And realising that his period was over, Jagannatha left immediately his temple in Puri in order to serve his true deliverer and spread his teachings.

After initiating Jagannatha, Mahima Gosvami subsisted for twelve years on fruit (Phalahari Gosain). There after he started taking milk as well, supplied to him everyday in new earthen bowls by the mother of the then king of Dhenkanal who, too, like her son, is described as a discaple in the Mahima Dharma Scriptures. After the expiry of the last 10 years, Mahima Gosvami converted Annapurna, the goddess of abundance,

accepted boiled rice from her for the first time and started afterwards roaming through the country and preaching with his disciple Jagannatha.

This biography unites the most important elements of Orissa's history of religion and subordinates it to Mahima Svami; the Saivism is represented by the Kapilas Temple. The snake God, the mother goddes and Jagnnatha are at the service of the new deliverer.

There are hardly any details about the actual personality of the founder. It is only certain that he was a Vaisnava originally who had settled on Kapilas near the Siva Shrine, took part in temple service, looked after the sick who sought recovery on Kapilas, had tremendous success in it and won a certain fame.

The Tahasildar of Banki reported in 1881 that Mahima Swami was previously called Mukunda Das and after leaving Kapilas, he had lived for 6 years near the Loknath Temple in Puri. However, this statement is not corroborated by any other sources.

The beginning of his public appearance, thirty six years after his first appearance in Orissa. i.e, 1862, is confirmed by the statements of other sources.

The first deed of this period was the wonderful conversion of Bhima Bhoi, whose famous poems the sect owes a major part of its popularity.

Bhima Bhoi was blind from birth (?), a foundling, adopted by a couple of khond tribe in Kandhara (Rairakhol). He left them when he was still a child and eked out his living by begging, undertaking casual inferior jobs and narrating stories. When he met Mahima Svami in 1862, he is stated to have been only thirteen years old.

The remarkable meeting is described repeatedly in details. Mahima Svami and his disciple Jagannatha (Vasudeva) appeared before Bhima Bhoi in a vision and restored him his eyesight. After realising, however, who his visiters were, Bhima Bhoi requested them to take away his eyesight, so that he has not to see the wickedness of the world, and to bestow on him instead the prophetic and poetic gift, so that he could herald the new teachings.

One of the most singnificant works of Bhima Bhoi, Nirveda Sadhana, describes this vision followed by a preceptive conversation between Mahima Svami and Jagannatha expounding the new teachings.

In the following years, Mahima Svami preached in the former Feudatory states of Tigiria, Angul, Dhenkanal, Boudh, Rairakhol, Sonepur and Banki, set up Tungis and Mathas and gathered an apparently very fast growing number of disciples around himself, whom he ordained after a certain period first as kanapatias or kaupina dharis (cloth or Kaupin Wearers) and later, at times, as kumbhipatias or Balkaladhari (bark of 'Kumbhi' wearers)

The Kanapatias wear a so called Kaupina i.e., ochre coloured cotton loincloth which is passed through the legs and tied to a twisted girdle.

The kumbhipatias or Balkaladharis have the same form of loin cloth on, the only difference being that it consists of the dried bark of kumbhi tree which has the same colour of the kaupins.

The distinctive mark of the sect are the characteristic big umbrellas made from a palm leaf which serve the roaming sannyasis as a protection against sun and rain.

Mahima Svami is said to have ordained himself 64 Balkaladharis who are also termed as Siddha Babas-a clear

allusion to the 64 siddha Nathas of the Natha Sect with which Mahima Dharma has many a thing in common.

During Mahima Svami's life time there were, no doubt, tensions which later led to the setting up of two different kinds of denominations within the sect.

The term kumbhipatia is sometimes used for the entire sect. The fact that the bark of just this tree is used, has perhaps its origin in the relationship of its name with the name of the Ajapa Mantra (Hamsa), which is also called Kumbhaka Mantra in Bhagabata Purana and is of great significance in the meditative Practice of the sect.

Besides his direct disciples, Mahima Svami also converted a large circle of layman who supported the new religion financially.

Yet the new religion met naturally with stiff opposition, especially from Brahmins, Historian N.K.Sahu makes mention of, though unfortunately without any reference, a complaint having been filed by Brahmins with the then Commissioner of Orissa against Mahima Svami because he allured Brahmin women to embrace his religion.

Probably Mahima Svami also visited the surroundings of Cuttack during this period- where there were Christians, i.e. Baptist missionaries already since 1822. It is not ruled out that he came into contact with their propaganda or atleast with the followers of Kujibarh Matha where, even before the arrival of missionaries in Orissa, a Guru made the Christian teachings known which he had taken from a Bengali translation of the New Testament. This possible encounter with the Christianity is on principle other than the one from which the so called neo-Hinduism has emerged. The Christianity with which Mahima Svami possibly came into contact was translated into Oriya in the brochores of the missionaries, as well as right in the teachings of

the Kujibarh Guru who had firmly refused to be converted. In these translations , the christian teachings were thus already adapted to the thinking and receptiveness of its new surroundings. On the other hand , the neo-Hinduism came into existance out of a situation of estrangement in which the higher classes, mostly educated in the English way , had found themselves.These had got to know christianity and Western philosophers very well and initially had regarded them as superior to their own tradition

Thus, where as new -Hinduism came into existence out of a sort of 'Cultural Shock' and devoted itself mainly to the theoritical discussions with Christianity and its own tradition, the possible encounter between Christianity and Mahim Dharma took place "from equal to equal" on a common cultural niveau within which Mahima Dharma could have taken over without hesitation individual features of christianity without any constraint that a fundamental discussion would have taken place simultaneously.

Such an element could be the consecutive ceremony of confession and a common feast(Satsanga Gosthi) which seems to be of christian origin at the first sight. On the other hand , individual confession is not practised by Baptists and Catholic missionaries came in the state only after the era of Mahima Svami.



Extract from "Mahima Dhrama : An Autochthonous Hindu Reform movement in the cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa 1978,p.382 by Dr. (Miss) Annacharlott Esch Mann.

MAHIMA GOSAIN
(Reproduced from records)

The Back Ground of Mahima Dharma

The fall of Orissa to the Britishers in 1803 and the great famine called "Naanka"of 1866 left Orissa with idoltary pervading all ranks, dominance of Brahmins and rigid caste system.

An attempt was made by the British and American missionaries to spread christianity and to condemn idol worship, superstitions etc. In the eyes of missionaries , Orissa was a 'Garden of idolatry and superstitions.' The very basis of Hinduism was challanged.

Orissa during the 19th century in the context of the Indian Renaissance and the social and political changes in the offing all over the world was a virgin soil for a new cult like Mahima cult, the principles of which came in opposition to orthodox.

The famine striken people who ran to 'Annachhatra' to save their lives declared out-caste by the orthodox Hindus. To bring them into caste-society Mahima Gosain converted them into Mahima cult. He brought a revolutionary change in the prevaling practice of the orthodox Hindus by rejecting caste system, Hindu social and religious rites and customs and idolatry.

The people in the country , mostly from rural areas, covering almost all castes , who are apparantly illiterate but truly wise embraced Mahima cult for its simplicity and started regulating their conduct and household practices as prescribed by Mahima Gosain.

The steps taken by Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain for the spread of his religion soon turned into a movement but reacted adversely by the privileged classes like Brahmins, Raja, Zamidars etc. For instance , Raja of Madhupur drove away the followers of this cult from his territory . The Brahmins of Jajpur had resolved in a meeting that they would not allow the spread of the doctrine of this cult in their locality. (Utkal Dipika, Dt. 6.9.1873,Part viii,Issue no 36).

In spite of all protests, the mahima Cult of Orissa covered almost all parts of Orissa Although Mahima Gosain propagated his cult for 14 years only, ie, from 1862 (siddhi) to 1876 (death),by dint of his determination and hard labour he could establish his cult not only in Orissa but also outside Orissa.He was fortunate enough to be worshipped by his followers as God during his life time and also after his death.

At present the followers of Mahima cult accept Mukunda Das , the super-man, to be the supreme God . They say that Mahima Gosain , the founder of Mahima Cult has no parents. He is born not out of any womb, nobody has created him. He is said to have been created by him-self He is Param Brahma. He is Ajoni Sambhuta. '

Mahima Gosain , the founder of Mahima Dhrama occupies a most distinguished place in the rligious history of India . He left behind a religion quite befilting to the age.

Mahima Gosin's Mahima Dharma is the latest fluorescnce in Orissa .Since it made its appearance in the modern period , it was natural to imbibe the essence of different other existing religions Mahima Gosain being aware of the need of time implanted this faith among the people.

As mentined by Sri. S. Nath (Mahima Dharmadhara)"Mahima Gosain had the vision of and set the pace for an integrated and cohesive social order based on equality and equity. Caste division and the supporting idolatry and poly theism being at the hight of their glory , he raised his voice against both . He eschewed all distinctions between man and man during his itinerary .xx

He revived 'Sanatan Dharma Dhara",based on "Biswamaitri Bhavana". Caste was considered not on hereditary lines but on "Barnashrama".He there by stood as a counter to christianity and "Brahma Dharma" brought the solidarity of mankind and saved the lower caste citizens including untouchables from conversion into those faiths.

He discarded sorcery and witch craft and other tantric prctices generally adopted as an easy means of the fulfilment of individual selfish desires and also found inevitable in a state of social insecurity , arising out of moral deprivation and illiteracy.

All these speak of his humanitarian out look towards life and living beings and humanistic approach to world problems."

Mahima Marga

During 19th century , the Vedic Karma Kanda was mechanically practised specially because it fell into illiterate hands from the point of view of those who administered it and on whom it was administered and also because of the difficulty of the Vedic Verses in being easily accessible to the common man who was ever denied of the right to recite and listen to the Vedas.

But Mahima Dharma kept open Brahma Vidya which is the essence of the Vedic wisdom and gave the right to every body to practise the Vedic Upanishadic ways. It was established that Brahma is beyond all tributes,.

The Mahima Marga is 'Bishuddha Adwaita Brahma Jnana Bhakti Yoga' supported by Vedanta.

Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain

Mahima Gosaim alias Mukunda Das has been turned in to a mythical figure by his followers. But there is enough evidence to show that in his daily habits and behaviour this genius was a little above an average human being. The place where he was born, his parentage, his activities and where he died have been identified now.

Mukunda Mishra, son of Ananta Mishra of Boudh became Mukunda Das after he was discipled by a hindu Baishnava Baba.

It is revealed from the Govt. records available in the state Arechieves, Bhubaneswar that one Mukunda Das came to Puri in 1826 A.D on a pilgrimage from Balasingha Matha, Baudh. He lived for a long time as an Achari Vaishnaba and was known as Dhulia Babaji believing in and worhsipping Hindu deities. He had Gairik-Kaupin on his body, Jata on his head and Mala around his neck.

During the period of his stay at Puri he wa invited by the Pandits of Puri'Mukti Mandap Sabha to Participate in a discourse on the Philosophy of religion prevaling at that time.

The philosophy of the Panchasakha group was in vogue at Puri. They treated Lord Jagannath as 'Avatari Purusha', the Brahamn that is unique and does not ever face dissolution. He is also described as Alekh Swarup, ie. unwirtten one by Achyutananda.

Mukunda Das proceeded a step forward and tried to convince the Pandits of the Puri Mukti Mandap Sava, his theory of mono theism, ie. Advaita-bada, which means God

is one, there is no more than one God. He tried to establish his theory of shunyabada and Parma Brahma in the up-anisadic line of thought. Thus he discarded the worship of Lord Jagannath as Avatari Purusha. But his arguments were inmmediately rejected by the association of learned men in the Puri temple and Mukunda Das was humilated.

Thus he retuned from Puri Temple and the Mukti Mandap sava throughly disappointed and resolved not to enter any temple there after. Also he made up his mind to keep himself away from wise and so called learned people of town and to propagate his theory of Mano theism among the villagers. He lost his faith in Baishnabism as accepted by the Pandits of Puri Mukti Mandap sava.

Then he left Puri and came to Kapilas hills of Dhenkanal. His dwelling place was near the Shrine Chandrasekhar Mahadev and was a devotee of Shiva.

During his sojourn at Kapilas he was engaged in yeoman's service and succeeded in securing the respect of Raja, the devotes of Lord Shiva and the people of the Surrounding villages.

His visiting the chandrasekhar Temple at the dead of the night while every one had returned to rest, made people believe that he was in secret communion with the Lord Shiva and could successfully intercede with him on their behalf. Perhaps he was engaged in attaining some tantric achievement in the dead of the night.

Finding that he had sufficiently established his reputation and respect of the people, in a fine morning, he threw his Kaupin and Kanthi, cut off his Jata, the distinct features of a Hindu Baishnab and wore Kumbhipat to cover his nakedness.

There after he declared before the devotees of Lord Shiva and others that Mahadeva and other idols

worshipped by them were nothing but stone and wood and that the worship of these destructable articles was useless and of no avail. The creater of the universe was Alekh or Mahima and he is Shunya Parusha, Parama Brahma. He alone can communion with Him and get his prayer granted.

When he despaired and people pecked stones at him he left Kapilas and went to Balasingha (Boudh) which was his first Baishnaba Ashram. There he converted his first disciple Jagannath Das in to his newly found Alekh or Mahima Cult and renamed him as Govinda Baba.

In order to attract Jagannath Das to his new Cult he tried to create a fabricated story. This story has been narrated by Bhima Bhoi in his 'Nirbeda Sadhan'. He told Jagannath Das that he is incarnation of Lord Jagannath in flesh and blood and he had left Jagannath temple as he (Mahima Gosain) appeared on the earth. Such type of statement puzzled Jagannath Das and he became the first disciple of Mahima Cult. Now both of them propagated the new Cult among the villagers who were almost ignorant and illiterate people of lower class of Hindu community. They were induced to adopt the new religion by hopes of enjoyment if they followed and threats of perdition if they did not follow.

Such was the method adopted by him for propagating his new Mahima Cult.

At first, Mukunda Das expressed that the creater of the world was a spiritual being omnipresent and omniscient without any from, whom he called Mahima and that he alone could communicate with him and get down what he wished. He also expressed that he belived in the existance of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses, but they were under his commands and that they were bound to obey what ever he wished them to do.

No doubt, this was a self propaganda and a cleaver way of establishing himself as a super man or a powerful God.

Gradually the number of his disciple increased and they started believing him to be the God Alekh or Mahima. He took this oppertunity and declared before his disciples at Daruthenga that he is Mahima Gosain. This was an event of 1864 A.D.

Mukunda Das and his first disciple Jagannath Das alias Govinda Baba went to Rairakhol state and met Bhima Bhio in the small village called Kankanapada. The conversion of Bhima Bhoi is a great event in the history of Mahima Cult. Mukunda Das made this kandha boy conscious of his great potential genious and inspired him to write and sing songs of 'Mahima' for upliftment of mankind. This was an event of 1866 and Bhima Bhoi was sixteen years old at that time, Mukunda Das had already designated himself as Mahima Gosain.

Bhima Bhoi took his Guru Mukunda Das to be the God Mahima Gosaim and started composing lyrics and Bhajans by spontanious appeal.

By the time Bhima Bhoi met his Guru Mahima Gosain, he (Mahima Gosain) was too old.

Still then he was very sincere in progating his new Cult called ' Mahima'. He went round the people living in villages from door to door with a call to go the Mahima way to make themselves great and worth. He himself did what he wanted them to practise. The people came to sit around him and hear him.

His method of initiation was very simple and was free from Bhramins and mantras. It is stated that he initiated a non-formal system of prayer called Brhma Sharana and Darshna. Food of any kind even water was

forbidden from sunset to sunrise and simple type of food was encouraged. The daily bath was compulsory before 'prata Brahama Muhurta Shrana'. To tell truth was the principal commitment. The diciple had to believe in one god and one universe and shun idolatry. The sense of pride arising out of caste, knowledge, wealth is to be avoided. They should have simple dress and particulary saffron coloured cloth.

Allegation against Mahima Gosain and Harekrushna Das

It is stated by Dr. N.K. Sahu in his article 'Bhima Bhoi' (Mahima Dharma Dorshan, DAV, College, Koraput, 1972) that, in 1873 some persons submitted representation before T.E. Ravenshaw, the then commissioner of Orissa division complaining that Mahima Gosain was seducing the ladies of respectable families to become nuns of the Mahima sect.

Next year (1974) there took place a serious quarrel among the followers of Mahima Gosain at Malbiharpur leading to violence and bloodshed.

This gave sufficient ground to send Rai Bahadur Harekrushna Das, the Asst. superintendent of Police to arrest the Sadhu.

The Rai Bahadur came to Dhenkanal with a police force and Mahima Gosain being much annoyed proceeded towards Keonjhar in order to evade government action against him. But he fell seriously ill at "KirtanPur" and was subsequently carried on a "Doli" by the followers to "Madhi" (modern Kamaksha Nagar) where he breathed his last in 1876 . He was given samadhi on the 10th day of the bright fortnight of Falguna that year at Joranda which developed as the most important seat of the Mahima Cult.



MAHIMA GOSAIN'S ACTIVITIES

Bhima Bhoi's Description

Bhima Bhoi came in contact with Mahima Gosain, the founder of the Mahima Cult, in the year 1966 A.D.

At that time Bhima Bhoi was 16 years old.

The meeting of Bhima Bhoi with Mahima Gosain was a great event in the history of Mahima religion.

By 1866 A.D. Mahima Gosain was too old. He survived only for 10 years after meeting with Bhima Bhoi. He died in 1876 A.D. Bhima Bhoi, the Adikabi (first poet) of Mahima Cult has written many things about Mahima Gosain, his guru in his poems. He has been described to be old having emaciated body, matted hair, some times on Kaupin or loin cloth sometes on bark.

In a Bhajana he writes "has anybody seen him with his own eyes going by this way in the dress of an atithi (Mandicant) in his old age ?"

What was he doing at Kapilas ?

Babu Banamali Singh who was working as Manager-cum-Magistrate of Dhenkanal writes in his letter no 40 Dt.8.10.81 addressed to the Supt. of the Tributary Mahals as following-

" The founder of the (Mahima) sect came to Dhenkanal about 30 years ago. He was then a follower of Hindoo Religion and was of the Vaisnava sect. He lived in the Kapilas hills near the shrines of the Mahadev there for about 12 years. While there, he used to drink with only and

did not take any other food and was called "Phalahari Gosain."

During the time he was at Kapilash, he was a devot worshipper of the Mahadev and took much pains in improving the place by cutting Jungles and making gardens and looking after the 'Bhog' of the idaol and taking care of the pilgrims who went there.

The Late Maharaj's mother had great respect for him and his food was supplied by her.

He gradually succeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages and it was believed by many that through his intercession they could get their objects fulfilled by the idol.

Kapilas being a place naturally of good climate, the sick peolpe generally go there and succeed after in restoring their health.

The Phalahari Gosaim used to take great care of the sick people who went there and he used to go to the temple of the Mahadeva in the dead of night after everyone had gone to his bed. It is supposed that these circumstances created a belief in the mind of the people that he was in secret communication with the idol and could by intercession relieve them of their diseases.

3. After thus remaining serveral years at Kapilash, when he found he had sufficiently established a reputation and secured the respect of the people, he left the place and openly gave out to the people that the 'Mahadeva' and other idols worshipped by the Hindus were nothing else than stones and wood and that the worship of these destructable objects was quite useless. xxxx

5. The man who was first called Phalahari Gosain was after words designated 'Mahima' Gosain and was believed to be an incarnation of the Almighty God.

In the year 1874, while I was on tour in the interior of Dhenkanal, the founder of the Mahima or Alekh religion went with me from place to place and was with me for about a week and I also saw him on several other occasions, but I never heard from him that he professed to be the creator of the world as his disciples and followers believed him to be.

From what I heard from him, I concluded that he believed that the creator of the world was a spiritual being omnipresent and omniscient without any form whom he called " Mahima" and also "Alekh Pravu" and that he alone could communicate with Alekh Pravu and get down what ever he wished.

He believed in the existance of the Hindoo Gods and goddesses but said that they were under His commands and that they were bound to obey what ever He wished them to do."

Banki Tehasildar writes as follows in his letter no.131 Dt.06.08.1881 addressed to the Commissioner of Orissa Division, Cuttack :-

"The Alekh religion did not originate in Banki. It is said to have originated on the Kapilash Hill in Dhenkanal".

There was a hermit named Mukunda Das. He was at first an 'Achari Baishnab' believing in and worshipping Hindu Deities. He is said to have lived for some time only drinking water and then for nearly 12years only drinking milk and to have worshipped idols while he continued as 'Achari Baishnab' till about the year 1856.

When he despaired and people pecked stones at him, threw off his cloth Koupin (or Rag to cover nakedness) and Kanthi (or string of beads worn round the neck), wore Kumbhipat i.e., the Pat or Pack of a tree called Kumbhi to cover his nakedness, left Kapilash, went to Poore.........

And what he did after attaining "Siddhi" or self-realisation?

Mahima Gosain alias Mukunda Das came to Kapilash Hills in Dhenkanal in 1838 A.D. and meditated there for 24 years. He had 'Gairik Kaupin' on his body, Jata on his head and 'Rudrakhya Mala' around his neck.

He was a devotee of Shiva at that time.

He attained Siddhi in 1862 and gave up Kaupin. He used the bark of Kumbhi tree only.

After attaining Siddhi he started his missionary tour to expound his new faith among the people for 14 years and breathed his last in 1876 A.D.

Babu Banamali Singh, Manager-cum-Magistrate, Dhenkanal writes as follows :-

"When he left Kapilash, he went towards Patiya and Khordha and made some disciples who went to different parts of the country and preached the new religion.

A place of worship first established at Daruthenga in the Puri District and a few days later another house of worship called 'Tungi' was built at Malbeharpur in Banki and gradually when the number of followers increased, many other Tungis were built in almost all the Tributary states and in Sambalpur and Cuttack Districts.

"As far as I know, the followers of this religion are almost all ignorant and illiterate people of the lower class of the Hindu community who were induced to adopt the new religion by hopes of enjoyment if they followed and threats of perdition if they did not follow the precepts of the disciples. XX

6. "The Mahima Gosain who is the founder of the Alekh religion made Govinda Das his first disciple, this man

went towards Sambalpur and spread the religion in that side.

A Tungi (Place of worship) was built at Malbeharpur and Narsing Das, the second disciple was placed in charge of it. This man with the assistance of other miner disciples spread the religion in the Tributary Mahals and in the Regulation Districts of the Orissa Division.

Thus in a few years, the Mahima Gosain succeeded in making many disciples and followers and on the days of full moon, thousands of men and women from distant parts were seen going to the Tungis at Malbeherpur and also at other places with Bangy loads of ghee, sugar, silk clothes, silver and brass utensils and many other valuable things."

Angul Tahasildar writes in his letter No.513 Dt.12.08.1881 addressed to the Commissioner of Orissa, Cuttack as follows :-

7. "xx The Mahima Swami is said to have built 21 tungis in the estate of Angul, Banki, Dhenkanal and Hindol within the jurisdiction of which he used to preach his religion.

He is also said to travel everyday from one tungi to another and would never stay at any place or beg his food or Bhikhya before reaching a tungi. The relative distance of which were the limits of a days's journey.

On his arrival at every tungi, his feet were washed by his followers and ashritas with 'Saptamruta' being a mixture of milk, curd, sugar, honey, sandal wood powder and camphor differing from the Panchamruta of the Hindus by the addition of Camphor and sandal, which they used to drink as something holy for their salvation. xxx

8. In the year 1875 on full moon (Purnima) day of the month of Kartika a fair was held at Jaka, a place in Dhenkanal where a large multitude of the followers of Mahima had assembled. They had brought with them various kinds of valuable and precious kinds of cloth etc. to present Mahima Swamy who after their exhibition caused them to be burnt in the sacred pile of fire or Dhuni.

It is also said that the Swami had offered them to the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal who declined to accept.

The fair was first arranged to be held at Angarabandh in Angul, but was afterwards removed to Dhenkanal with the intention of receiving assistance from the Maharaja, who it is said, was a great friend to the Mahima Swami and had patronised the spread of religion.

The Mahima Swami died in the month of Falguna following the fair."

The Commissioner of Orissa Division, Cuttack in his letter No.402 Dt.01.11.1881 addressed to the Secretary to Government, Judicial Department writes as follows :-

5. "After thus remaining at Kapilash for several years and finding that he had sufficiently established his reputation and the respect of the people, Mukunda Das left the place and began to preach that Mohadev and other idols worshipped by the Hindus were nothing else but stone and wood and that the worship of these destructable articles was useless and of no avail, that the creater of the Universe was Alekh(Mahima) Mohadev for literally means glorious, a spiritual being without form, omnipresent and omniscient and that he alone could hold communion with him and get prayers granted.

He exchanged his Kaupin (waist cloth) and Kanthi(wooden bead worn round the neck), the two distinc-

tion feature in the exterior of a Vaishnab and wore Kumbhipat (the bark of a tree called Kumbhi) to cover his nakedness.

The Death of Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain

Babu Banamali Singh, the then Magistrate of Dhenkanal writes as follows in the said letter :-

7. "At last, the founder of the religion who was believed to be over existent died, and the Tungis together with the goods which they contained were sold and most of the followers, finding that the Mahima Gosain was no better than an ordinary man, disbelieved what he had taught and came back to the Hindu religion. The disciples and followers who had left their homes and been out casted could not go back to their families and were obliged to continue in the new life they had adopted.

Some of the followers also who did not renounce the world, but were special favourities still follow the Mahima Cult.

8. At present (1881 A.D.) there are only two places of worship in Dhenkanal, one at Joranda where the Mahima Gosain died and was buried and the another at Mahalpara where Narasingh Das now lives.

The Kumbhipatias go to Joranda and the Kanapatiyas to Mahalpara and these two sects are not in good terms with each other.

9. During the time the Mahima Gosain lived the Kumbhipatiyas and Kanapatiyas were not considered different sects."

Angul Tahasildar writes in his letter No.513 Dt.12.08.1881 as follows :-

6. "They (followers of Mahima Cult) do not recognise the demise of the 'Mahima Swami' but say that he has disappeared and may at any time come to them as their saviour.

It is said that Nrusinga Das is the principal follower of Mahima Swami who is at present living in Dhenkanal. But he is not seen to have any superiority over the other Kumbhipatias who are equally respected by each other and by Ashritas.

In fact, the followers of Mahima appear to have no Leader after the death of Mahima Swami. They have been scattered in almost all the Garjats of Orissa in the Chhatisgarh Division of the Central Province in the regulation districts of Orissa and Ganjam. Among the Garjats their members are more numerous in the estates of Dhenkanal, Banki, Hindol and Angul than elsewhere.

Ashrita- Kanapatiya - Kumbhipatiya

A Man wished to adopt the new religion first became an Ashrita, which means a, dependant. In this state he was not required to leave his home or caste.

Afterwards if he wished to renounce the world, he was to eat with everybody without distinction of caste and remain always at one of the places of worship called Tungis. In this state, he was allowed to wear cloth and was, therefore, called Kanapatiyas.

After remaining in this state for some time, if any of the Kanapatiyas was considered fit to be Kumbhipatiya, the Mahima Gosain used to favour him with a Kumbhipat (bark of a tree called Kumbhi) and from that time he would never wear cloth but only the bark of Kumbhi tree.

10. The Kumbhipatiyas and Kanapatiyas do not bathe but wash after eating themselves and they do not eat after sun set.

They have no books of religion except a few songs in praise of the Mahima and Alekh which they sing when they meet together in the evening."

(Vide letter No.40 Dt.08.10.1881 of Babu Banamali Singh)

Alekh Mahima Dharma and Jatapitha Balasingha

Shri Damodar Padhi in his article "Alekh Mahima" Dharma O' Jatapitha Balasinga " (appeared in weekly Prajatantra Dt.03.09.1997) has stated as follows :-

"It is ascertained from Mahima Vinod (Part-II) written by Bhima Bhoi that Mahima Gosain alias Mukunda Das was born in a Brahmin family of Boudh an ex-feudatory state. His father's name is Ananta Mishra.

His first Ashrama was at "Balasingha" which is situated at a distance of 6 kilometres from Boudh Town and is situated by the side of Balangir road. This is now known by the name "Jatagadi".

Shri Nakamudia Pal, writer, of "Alekha Purana" has written in his description on "Bada Govinda barnana" (Ist Part), that the village Balasinga is the place of meditation of Mahima Gosain.

The village Balasinga is situated at the left side of Boudh-Balangir road. There is a big "Mahul" tree in the centre of a grass field. This "Mahul " tree is worshipped as "Mahapravu" tree.

Govinda baba alias Jagannatha Das was the first disciple of Mahima Gosain (Mukunda Das) and Bhima Bhoi was his second disciple.

Govinda baba spent a very long time here (Balasinga) in meditation and propagation of Mahima Dharma.

Mahima Gosain had left his jata (matted hair) at Balasinga. The temple is also known as "Jata Samadhi Mandira" and is worshipped for the same reason.

The temple has been constructed having its face towards east and it is in the centre of the village etc."



MAHIMA DHARMA AND BHIMA BHOI

Extract from the book "A Glimpse into Oriya Literature" Chapter-VII, the wings of change, page 157 to 160 by Shri Chittaranjan Das under the above heading is reproduced below. The book has been published by "Orissa Sahitya Academy, Bhubaneswar" in 1982 December.

"It is so interesting to note that a real protest had then to come from Mahima Dharma,, an autochthonous religious movement, in Orissa in the nineteenth century. Very strange again that the centre of the movement was not the costal districts of the State.

The seat of the Mahima Dharma continues to be in the district of Dhenkanal in central Orissa.

The leader of the Mahima Dharma was Mahima Gosain, about whom very little has been yet know. But it is almost sure that he had come in contact with the Christian missionaries and their literature. Mahima Dharma was the last protest of the saints against the established Hindu religion. It was not a Budhistic movement, neither had it do anything with the Vaishnava way of worship, it did not believe as a religion in getting the sanction of the king to be able to survive and flourish and it proclaimed an open revolt against the exeternalist obsessions in religion. It flourished out of the courts, out of the influences of the King's mace, flouted the superiority of the Brahmins and registered most of its followers from the lowliest and the downtrodden in society.

It was an effort to give to those who stood at the lowest in the status-infested society a real sense of human dignity and sought to raise them up as equals and devotees.

The movement continues to live, mostly as a vestige of an alternative to what is and as an indication of what might be.

Bhima Bhoi is the most precious gift of the Mahima Dharma to Oriya literature and he should also be claimed as the most precious gift of Orissa and Oriya literature to the legacy that is India.

Bhima Bhoi was an Adivasi, came from a poor Kond family. He lost his eyesight when he had yet to find himself out in the world.(x) But the gems of literature he has dictated to be copied down and preserved are so full of sympathy, understanding and love towards mankind and the bright future that waits for him if he chooses to follow the real path to enlightenment, cleanses himself of all egotism and prejudice and has the right kind of courage which helps him grow into the fullest realization of the man in himself, expressed at its best as living for the entire mankind and for God.

The language Bhima Bhoi has used is the clear, spoken language that an illiterate but inspired man could command.

Bhima Bhoi belonged to Sonepur, one of the-then feudatory small states in Western Orissa had to suffer the wrath of his King and is also ascribed to be the person who had inspired an attack on the Puri Temple by the new sect of Mahima Gosain's followers, claiming that Lord Jagannath did not belong to the Brahmins and the higher castes, but to the original inhabitants of the land, the Adivasis.

There are many books attributed to Bhima Bhoi's name. The most widely known are the "Stuti

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(x) It has since been proved that Bhima Bhoi was never blind.(Writer)

Chintamani", Srutinisedha Gita, Brahma nirupana Gita and the Nirbeda Sadhana. But the most loved and widely known are the scores of Bhajanas he has left to all who would hunger for a better life also in this world, a life of consecration and complete offer.

In a line in Stuti Chintamani, he says he is not so much worried at all for the whole world's redemption from misery, greed and heartlessness, one would work for it even if it means his own life being condemned to rot in hell.

Bhima Bhoi's literature is full of hopes and also full of promise. There is so much of the modern sensibility in his views on man, his society and the institutions that nurture him to what he becomes that one wonders how when the elite and the established seem to tarry and appear confused, the needed guidance in India comes from the ordinary level, the plane of the lowly but the most wise.

As Oriya literature advances and as more and more people really seek and choose to live life not in fragments but as a whole having a definite base, a centre and its dimensions, there will be more and more need for it to come back to Bhima Bhoi and rediscover him.

Bhima Bhoi is said to have left this world in 1868 (should be 1895).

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PART III

MAHIMA GOSAIN : A SUPER RELIGIOUS MAN

History and mystery.

Dr. M.N.Das in his preface to the book, 'Mahima Dharma Dhara' has mentioned as follows

"History is the essence of numerous biographies. If one wants to know the meaning of history let him look into the lives of great man". wrote clarlyle while explaining his concept of 'Universal History'.

Among these 'great men' there are three distinct types of individuals, namely ,

i. The Leaders of the mundane affairs of mankind, such as, Kings and conquerors, heroes and revolutionaries.

ii. The Leaders of human thought, such as, Poets and Philosophers, inventors and Discoverers and

iii. The creators of humanity as spiritual consciousness, such as, the founders of religions and prophets, messengers of divinity and preachers of holy faith.

There are, of course, other categories of greatmen, but the persons of the three above noted types are the most conspicuous among the makers of history. For researchers on the lives of the great men of the first two categories, the problem of finding facts may prove either easy or difficult, but such problem in respect of the lives of the founders of religions or prophets prove most difficult, at times, even insurmountable. Because, the lives of these men are un-common and un-worldly.

The birth and the early life of many of the prophets are invariably shrouded in mystery. The story of their revelation is beyond comprehension, and their life thereafter is full of miraculous and supernatural manifestations. Collection of facts for their biography, therefore, is no easy job for any researcher.

It is, of course, a challenge to write on the life and tenets of Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Cult, which is one of the latest cult for mankind that took shape in the mid-decades of 19th century in India in an obscure corner of the sub-continent among a people, at one time most neglected, poor and downtrodden. But it was a faith that carried the supreme essence of the intutive visions of India's ancient saints, the consciousness of the Divine, of the Truth and of the Infinity.

There is belief amongst the followers of the Mahima Sect that 'Mahima Gosain' was not born out of the womb of mother.

In Stuti Chintamani (87/2) Bhima Bhoi wrote - 'He (Mahima Gosain) has no parents. He is born not out of any womb. He has no scent of semen or blood, nobody has created him. He was created by himself. He has no form, no beginning and is the primeval root. There are various such references to such facts.

The followers of the Mahima Sect accept Bhima Bhoi's views, as the only authentic view on Mahima Gosain and believe the Mahima Gosain to be the supreme God, sometimes above all the thirtythree crores Gods of Hindu faith and sometimes equated with different Gods, specially with the 'Khira-Sindhu-Vasi Ananta Iswara' as stated in Stuti Chintamani boli (68/3).

It is a fact that Mukunda Das, the founder of Mahima Cult created the etymology "Mahima Gosain" and designated himself to be the "Mahima Gosain" at

'Daruthenga' village as per records. Obviously, "designation" has no parents. It is the designation and not the person as such designated, has no parents. Because the word (i.e., designation) was born not out of any womb but from the mouth only.

Mukund Das, after declaring himself to be the Mahima Gosain was recognised as such by his followers. Bhima Bhoi, the ardent disciple of Mukunda Das, described him as "Mahima Gosain" the creater of the world in all his writings. He addressed his Guru Mahima Gosain as **ALEKHA**, Nirakara, Shunya Purusha, "Ajoni Sambhuta" etc. Being a sincere 'bhakta' (disciple) he was totally correct in his statement.

But philosophy is not religion. Religion depends on bhakti (devotion) without reasoning, where as, philosophy is based on reasoning. Philosopher asks questions after questions till he is satisfied. He is not prepared to believe anything on simple faith. To a philosopher, a man in flesh and blood can never be ajoni sambhuta.

Rama, Krishna, etc. of Hindu cult, Jesus Christ of Christian Cult, Mohammad of Muslim cult, all were born from their mother's womb. They became Gods in their respective cults for their good deeds. Mahima Gosain was no less than Rama, Krishna, Jesus Christ and Mohammad. He can be treated as God for all purposes.

To prove Mahima Gosain as a super religious man, the methods of philosophy have been adopted. It has got nothing to do with religious faith and as such description of Mahima Gosain by its followers are set aside.

The intention of this book is to put-forth the historical figure of Mahima Gosain before the readers and not the legendary figure as narrated by the disciples of the cult. The researchers regard History and not mystery. To project Mahima Gosain as a super religious man available records of his time have been utilised as the later writings are mythical in nature.



RENOVATION OF EARLIER HISTORY

In order to arrive at any definite conclusion regarding the true picture of Mahima Gosain one must vividly go through the following facts :-

1. The written documents of Mahima Gosain.
2. The written documents of contemporary authors/ critics.
3. Official records and news items of the same period, if available.
4. Books written on Mahima Gosain and Mahima Cult at later period.
5. Local stories and Legends.

1. Written documents of Mahima Gosain.

Mahima Gosain has left no autobiography of his own. Although he ranks at a most towering figure in the field of religions and the wisest man of his time, he was perhaps not capable of writing about himself or his new cult, i.e., Mahima Cult. Hence the direct source of collecting data on the life and religion of Mahima Gosain ends without any conclusive results.

2. The written documents of contemporary authors critics

Bhima Bhoi, the greatest exponent of Mahima Dharma was a close and faithful associate of Mahima Gosain. Although Mahima Gosain left no accounts of his

own life and the faith, these have been echoed in the writings of Bhima Bhoi, the Adikabi (first poet) of Mahima Cult. The advantage he (Bhima Bhoi) enjoyed was that he had the blessings and guidence of his Guru Mahima Gosain. His writings are, therefore, the original source materials of Mahima Cult and Mahima Gosain.

In order to arrive at a sensible and scientific approch to the life of Mahima Gosain, the writings of Bhima Bhoi are second to none and that will form the history of Mahima Gosain.

It will be seen that the writings of Bhima Bhoi are un-sophisticated because they flow from his heart. It provides consistent, coherent and whole picture of Mahima Cult and Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Cult. These are mentioned in Bibliography annexure.

3. The Official records & the news items of the same period now available are :

1. 'SEVAK' a monthly magazine Dt.02.01.1884.

2. News items in the 'Utkal Dipika' entitled "the spread of the new religion" Dt.01.06.1867 and the second one entitled 'Mahima Babaji' Dt.06.09.1873. Another news in Utkal Dipika appeared in edition Dtd.13.03.1881 (Part-16, No-II) on the attack of Lord Jagannath at Puri.

In the official records one important event has been recorded regarding an attack on the Jagannath Temple by some of the so called followers of Mahima Cult.

Government Records relating to this incident are available vide Board of Revenue, Cuttack, Jagannath Temple correspondence, Vol.V No.42099. A summary of

this was published in the "proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal" in 1882 under the above title.

2. Additional short accounts of different authenticity are to be found in :-

a). The Census Report 1881 and in the Bengal District Gazetteer, Sambalpur, 1909 ("Bengal District Gazetteer Sambalpur", Calcutta, 1909, P.P.59-136).

b). Census of Mayurbhanj State 1931, Vol.I Page-120 by Mohammad Liaquiddin.

2. In 1911 two more detailed accounts of the doctrines of Mahima Dharma and their historical background appeared.

a). "The modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa" - Calcutta, 1911 P.P.159-172.

b). "The Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj" Vol.I Calcutta, 1911, P.P.CLXLV-CCLXIII by Nagendra Nath Basu.

The account on Mahima Cult is the same in both works.

4. Books written on Mahima Gosain & Mahima Cult at a later period.

Annexed

5. Local fabricated Stories and Legends on Mahima Gosain, Mahima Cult and Bhima Bhoi which are available in plenty bear no historical Status.

Records on the Mahima movement in Orissa during 19th Century.

The riot in Jagannath Temple took place on the Ist March 1881. But the information was received by the Commissioner of Orissa at Cuttack on the 9th March 1881, (Vide "Bengal under Lieutenant Governors" Vol.II by CE Buckland, 1901, P.733)

The first publication on Mahima movement is the descriptive account from the Commissioner of the Orissa Division "on the Origin and growth of the sect, of the Hindu dissenters who profess to be the followers of Alekh" appeared in the "proceeding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal" 1882 P.P.2-6.

In consequence of the Puri incident, the Commissioner of the Orissa Division collected information on the sect from Banki, Angul, Sambalpur and Dhenkanal (Vide Board of Revenue, Cuttack, Jagannath Temple correspondence, Vol.V No.42099), a summary of which was published in the "Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1882 under the above title.

2. Further short account of different authenticity are to be found in the Census Report 1881 and in the Bengal District Gazetteer, Sambalpur of 1909 (Vide L.S.O. Malley : Bengal District Gazetteer Sambalpur" Calcutta, 1909 P.P.59-136)

3. Two more detailed accounts of the doctrines of Mahima Dharma and their historical background appeared.

The first by B.C.Mazumdar as an appendix to his Book "Sonepur in the Sambalpur Tract, Calcutta, 1911, Appendix IV, P.P.-126-136. The author gives a detailed account of the life and proceedings of Bhima Bhoi and adds some points where Mahima Dharma resembles Digambar Jainism which was prevelent in the Sambalpur tract.

4. In the same year, i.e., 1911, two works of N.N.Bosu appeared :-

i). The modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa (Calcutta, 1911, P.P. 159-172).

ii). The archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanj (Vol.I, Calcutta, 1911 P.P.CLXLV-CCLXIII) The account of Mahima Dharma is the same in both works.

N.N.Bosu for the first time pointed out the obvious link between the doctrines of Mahima Dharma and medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa, especially the Panchasakha whose works are held in great esteem by the Mahima Dharmis.

But as he interpreted the philosophy of the Panchasakha as a hidden form of Buddhism, he concluded that Mahima Dharma can also be considered as a modern form of Crypto-Buddhism.

Three main facts are, in his opinion, supporting that thesis

1. The fact that Mahima Gosain, the founder of the Sect, is also called Prabudha Swami or Buddha.

2. The idea of the equality of all men in relation to God found in Mahima Dharma and

3. The rigid monastic organisation and some of its ritualistic details.

In spite of all that, Basu's view of Mahima Dharma as a form of Crypto-Buddhism has spread and is still current having penetrated into standard works like Elliot's "Hinduism and Buddhism".

(Charles Elliot, Hinduism and Buddhism, a History sketch, Vol.II, London, 1921,P.P.115-116)

But Shri P.Mukherjee in his "History of Medieval Vaishnavism in Orissa" (Calcutta 1940) has argued that the Panchasakha can not be regarded as Buddhists or Crypto-Buddhist but represent a very peculier and typically Orissa Vaishnava Theology, in which Buddhistic elements were taken up and happily melted, with what we undoubtedly have to consider as a peculiar but true Hindu, Vaishnava sight.

This conception has also been applied on Mahima Dharma.

MAHIMA GOSAIN : THE LIFE HISTORY

Basing on the official and non-official records relating to Mahima Gosain, books written by Bhima Bhoi and also the article published in "Weekly Prajatantra" (Dt.03.09.1997) the life history of Mahima Gosain is given below.

The real name of Mahima Gosain was Mukunda Das, who was the founder of Mahima Dharma.

It is learnt from Bhima Bhoi's Mahima Vindod, Part-II (Unpublished) that Mukunda Das was born in the ex-feudatory state of Boudh in a Brahmin family.

According to the followers of Mahima Dharma "Mahima Gosain" appeared (born) in 1732 A.D. and died in 1876 A.D. as per remarks of Pandit Antaryami Mishra of Badapanda Sahi, Dhenkanal in his article "Mahimamaya Mahima Swami" appeared in news paper 'Samaya' (2/98). This age factor still requires more investigation for authenticity.

The name of the father of Mukunda Das was Ananta Mishra. He was living in Boudh.

Mukunda Das, son of Ananta Mishra was called as Mukunda Mishra while he was staying with his family members.

It is derived from 50th Boli, canto 16, 17, 18 and 19 of "Stuti Chintamani" that Mukunda Mishra was a married person and was living with his family members for some period. Thereafter he took 'Dikshya' from a Hindu Baishnaba and became a 'Sadhu' (Mendicant). Thereafter his surname was changed to "Das" from "Mishra".

The word "dasa" means "Servant". The Baishnabas preferred to hold the title of "Dasa" after taking 'Dikshya' from their Gurus. They were 'dasa' or Servant of God.

The people were leaving "Grihastha Ashrama" (family life) and "Grihastha Dharma" (house hold affair) after becoming Baishnaba Sadhu. They were leading the life of a mendicant.

The Baishnabas were putting on 'chita' and 'mali' and saffron-coloured cloth after getting 'Kana-Kaupin-Bheka'. They did not believe in the traditional caste system. That is why people used to say :-

"Bara Jati Tera Gola

Baishnaba hele sabu gala"

means, A Baishnaba possess no caste. There is no consideration of caste, creed, colour, occupation, social status, prestige, power, position and wealth for a true Baishnava. To him all are equal. Their main objects of life is :-

"Namare Smaran

Jibare Daya"

i.e., Remember God at all time and have pity on all creatures.

With such motto, Mukunda Das was leading his life after taking "Veka Bana". There was a 'Baishnaba Matha' or 'Ashrama' at Balasingha near Boudh. It is 6Km. away from Boudh and is situated at the left side of Boudh-Balangir Road near Mahanadi. This Ashram was being patronised by the then King of Boudh.

Jagannath Das discipled

Mukunda Das went to Balasingha from Boudh and was in charge of the Ashram for some time. He was engaged in Japa, Dhyana, Kirtana like a Baishnaba of Hindu religion. Here at Balasingha, he discipled Jagannath Das and offered him "Karna Mantra" in Baishnaba way.

Mukunda Das poured in sacred water on Jagannath's head and touched his body uttering "Om". He besmered Jagannath's body with 'Chandan' and painted "Shree Hari Chita Tilaka" on his forehead. Then he offered "Karna Matra" in his ears. This Karna Matra was 'Solakhyar' (16 lettered) with thirtytwo names if repeated. This is called 'Mahamantra' as stated below :-

"Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare,

Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare"

Although, Jagannatha Das was discipled by Mukunda Das at Balsingha, he was not granted 'Veka Bana'. He remained as a disciple of Baishnab cult and did not get the 'Baba ' title at the beginning. He was only "Karna Mantra Dhari" disciple

This incident has been described in details in the Book 'Nirbeda Sadhana' third chapter. The description is most authentic as it has been written by the 'Adikabi' Bhima Bhoi of Mahima cult himself.

Note : The Mahamantra of Mahima cult is six lettered i.e., "Alekha Mahima".

The Balasingha Math or Ashrama was the first 'Siddha Bhumi' or 'Siddha Ashram" of Mukunda Das, the then Baishnab of Hindu Religion, as described by Bhima Bhoi in the last part of the third chapter of 'Nirbeda Sadhana'. This place was the store house of all achievements (Siddhi) desired by a Baishnaba. Baishnaba Mukunda Das left for Puri after this incident on pilgrimage. The charge of "Balasingha Ashrama" was handed over to his disciple Jagannath Das, "the Karna Mantra Dhari disciple".

Puri the nerve centre of Orissa.

Puri has been recognised as a place of all India pilgrimage. It has through the ages, been the meeting point and integrating factor for religious movements and the reformers. Moreover, the temple of the Lord Jagannath at Puri is the nerve centre of Orissan religion and culture. Therefore, epoch making leaders of thought and practice including Shankara,Ramanuja, Nanak, Sri Chaitanya have been drawn to this holy place.

Puri, rich with innumberable deities and temples, no wonder attracted Mukunda Das . Moreover, he must have desired to have a darsan of the Lord Jagannath. So his entrance to Shrikhetra Puri was inevitable.

Religious back ground of Puri, the conception of Sunya.

Buddha of Buddhism was already accepted as the ninth incarnation of Lord Bishnu at the time when Mukunda Das entered Puri. Buddhist concept of emptiness (Shunya) was already identified with the Hindu conception of Param Brahma and "Iswara Purush".

"Sunya Parama Brahma" is characterised more precisely with the concepts Alekh (in describable), Nirguna (without attributes), Nirakara (formless), Anadi(eternal),

Niranjana (Pure or without support) and Mahima (glory), all of which had already appeared in the medieval Oriya Literature for describing "Sunya Brahma" or as synonyms for him.

The concept of Sunya was in use in different schools of Hindu philosophical and religious traditions. Even the Buddhist concept of Sunya had its link with similar doctrine found in Vedanta.

In the medieval literary school known as "Panchasakha" (Jagannath, Balarama, Achyutananda, Yoshawanta and Ananta) used the words Sunya, Alekha, Anadi, Nirakara as attribution of the Lord Jagannath, the Avatari. Again these terms were equated with Param Brahma or Sunyabrahma.

Medieval Baishnab literature treated the concept of void not in the Buddhist sense of emptiness or absence. It was rather a presence, a concrete identity, the Alekh Purusha who was all powerful.

Mukunda Das at Puri

In a very critical period, Mukunda Das, the founder of Mahima cult appeared at Puri. It was 1826. A.D.

Mukunda Das had matted hair on his head and saffron-coloured loin cloth round his waist. He used to lie on dust on the main road or "Bada Danda". He would seldom speak in Oriya.

It is reported that, while at Puri Baishnab Mukunda Das was called "Dhulia Gosain". He was staying in a cave (Cottage) called 'Arka Cave' near "Lokanatha Pada". This cave is yet to be located. He did not attach importance to the body as per the religious practice of a true Baishnaba.

Invitation from Mukti Mandapa Sava.

It is also said that, while at Puri he was invited to participate in the discussion on religious matters at the "Mukti Mandapa Sava" inside Jagannath Temple. As a Baishnaba of Hindu religion, he entered in to the Jagannath Temple. He tried to establish his theory of "Advaita-bada" which means, "God is one", before the association of learned men in the Puri temple but failed to convince them.

He then returned from the Temple totally disappointed and never entered there again.

After this incident, he toured around Khurda area including Dhauligiri, Khandagiri, Udayagiri, Bhubaneswar etc. for long 12 years. He got a few followers during this period.

It is said bythe followers of the Mahima Cult that he was living only on water for 12 years i.e., from 1826 to 1838 A.D. and was, therefore, called "Nirahari Gosain".

Mukunda Das at Kapilash

In 1838.A.D. Mukunda Das came to Kapilas hills in Dhenkanal district and stayed there for 24long years. It is said by the followers of Mahima Cult that he (Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain) lived on fruits only for 12 years (i.e., from 1838 to 1850 A.D.) and was called "Phalahari Gosain" . The next 12 years (i.e., from 1850 to 1862 A.D.) he lived on milk which was being sent by Raja. Bhagirathi Mahendra Bahadur of Dhenkanal and was called "Khirahari Gosain".

It is also said that, one "Sadananda Sabara" of the village Deogaon, situated at the foot of Kapilash hills supplied fruits, roots etc. available in Kapilash for food to Mahim Gosain for the first 12 years (i.e., fro 1838 to 1850

A.D.). For the next 12 years (i.e, from 1850 to 1862 A.D.) milk was being supplied by Raja Bhagirathi Mahendra Bahadur of Dhenkanal with a hope to get a child on his blessing as the King was childless.

During his (Mukunda Das) stay at Kapilash hills, his disciple Jagannath Das came from Balasingha(Boudh) to meet him and was granted 'Veka Bana' made of saffron-coloured cloth. This was done in accordance with Baishnaba faith and henceforth Baishnaba Jagannatha Das was recognised as 'Jagannatha Das Baba'. Guru Mukunda Das declared him to be a siddha Baishnaba. Thereafter he (Jagannath Das Baba) was sent back to Balasingha to look after the Balasingha Math (Ashrama) as his representative during his absence.

After attaining Siddhi

It is mentioned in Mahima literatue that Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain attained Siddhi (perfection or realisation) in 1862 A.D. at the Kapilash hills and started his missionary tour to expand his new faith among the people.

It is, therefore, proved that the Mahim Cult came into existance only after 1862 A.D..

He (Mahima Gosain) went round the people from door to door with a clarion call to go the Mahima way to make themselves great and worthy. He himself did what he wanted them to practise in daily life.

In the beginning his missionary purpose of spreading the mesage of Mahim cult failed and did not bear any fruit as nobody responded him.

He proceeded to Balasingha (Boudh) to convert his disciple Jagannath Das into his new Mahima faith.

Balasingha (Boudh) was his first "Baishnaba Siddha Ashrama" as declared by him as Abadhuta and retold by Bhima Bhoi in the third chapter of 'Nirveda Sadhana' grantha.

Jagannatha Das renamed as Govinda Baba

Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosin reinitiated Jagannatha Das and converted him in to his newly found Mahim faith and renamed him as 'Govinda Das'.

Thereafter the new name 'Govinda Das' or 'Govinda Das Baba' became his only identification. He renounced all other identification such as parentage, place of birth, age etc.

He (Govinda Baba) became the first of the 64 Siddhas of Mahima Cult, and was called 'Adisiddha' (first self-realised) from whom the Siddha Sannyasa order of the first line was established.

With detailed instructions from Mahima Gosain, he went west ward for the spread of the new Mahim religion. The situation faced by Govinda Baba has been described vividly in the book 'Nirbeda Sadhana' by Bhima Bhoi.

After the death of Govinda Baba

Govinda Baba went west-ward and reached Sambalpur and then to Sonepur. At both the places people received him with great enthusiasm.

In 1867 Govinda Baba died in an obscure village called 'Daruthenga' (Puri) where he was given samadhi according to the rites of the faith.

He was a great organiser and powerful preacher of the Mahim Cult and his death was a great blow on this

newly developing religion. But not withstanding this loss, the Mahima Cult vigorously spread over Banki, Tigiria, Narasinghapur and many other parts of Orissa. Malbiharpur near Banki became an important seat of this religion and Mahim Puja was celebrated there with great zeal by the new converts.

Mahima Gosain had to face considerable oppositions from the Brahmins and the Baishnabas among whom he could recruit large number of followers.

In 1875 A.D. a fair was held in the month of Kartka at Jaka in Dhenkanal ex-state where large number of followers of the Mahima Gosain assembled. This was the last fair organised by Mahima Gosain. Mahima Gosain breathed his last in the month of Falguna following the Jaka fair. It was in the year 1876 A.D.



MUKUNDA DAS AT KAPILASH

With a most exquisite sylvan beauty and unprecedented quietude all around, Mukunda Das spent 24 long years of his life from 1838 to 1862 A.D. on Kapilas Hills.

He was a follower of Hindu Religion and was of the Vaishnaba sect at Kapilas.

Babu Banamali Singh, Manager of Dhenkanal state, has written in his letter No.40 Dt.08.10.1881 addressed to the Supdt. of the Tributary Mahals, Orissa as following :-

"The founder of the sect came to Dhenkanal about 30 years ago, he was then a follower of Hindu Religion and was of the Vaishnava sect.

He lived in the Kapilash hills near the shrines of the Mahadeva there for about 12years, While there he used to drink with only and did not take any other food and was called Phalahari Gosain.

During the time he was at Kapilash, he was a devout worshipper of Mahadeva and took much pains in improving the place by cutting jungles and making gardens and looking after the 'Bhog' of the idol and taking care of the pilgrims who went there.

The late Maharaja's mother had great respect for him and his food was supplied by her.

He gradually succeeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages and it was believed by many that through his intercession they could get their objects fulfilled by the idol.

Kapilash being a place naturally of good climate the sick people generally go there and succed in restoring their health. The Phalahari Gosain used to take great care of the sick people who went there and he used to go to the temple of the Mahadeva in the dead of night after everyone had gone to his bed.

It is supposed that, these circumstances created a belief in the mind of the people that he was in secret communication with the idol and could by intercession relieve them of their diseases.

After thus remaining several years at Kapilash, when he found that he had sufficiently established a reputation and secured the respect of the people, he left the place and openly gave out to the people that the Mahadeva and other idols worshipped.by the Hindus were nothing else than stones and wood and that the worship of these destructible objects were quite useless. x x x

In letter No.402 Dt.01.11.1881 of the Commissioner of Orissa Division addressed to the Secretary, Judicial Department, the report of Babu Banamali Singh has been given in ditto.

In para-5 of the said letter it has been mentioned that "He (Mukunda Das) exchanged his Kaupin (waist cloth) and Kanthi (wooden bead worn round the neck), the two distinction feature in the exterior of a Vaishnab and wore Kumbhipat (the bark of a tree called Kumbhi) to cover his nakedness.

Banki Tahasildar in his letter No.131 Dt.06.08.1881 addressed to the Commissioner of Orissa Division, Cuttack has mentioned as follows :-

"Account of Alekh Religion"

"The Alekh religion did not originate in Banki.

There was a hermit there named Mukunda Das. He was at first an "Achari Vaishnab" believing in and worshipping Hindu deities. He is said to have lived for some time only drinking water and then for nearly 12 years only drinking milk and to have worshipped idols while he continued as Achari Baishnab till about the year 1856.

When he despaired and people packed Stones at him, he threw off his cloth Kaupin (or Rag to cover nakedness) and 'Kanthi' or string of beads worn round the neck, wore Kumbhipat, i.e., the pat or pack of a tree called Kumbhi to cover his nakedness, left Kaupin, went to poore where he lived for about 6 years at Lokanatha Pada on the sand near Loknath Mahadev Temple in mud hut which he made there.

He then came to Daruthenga in Khurda where he built a house (worth about Rs.150/-) and stayed there now and then but mostly moved here and there.

At Daruthenga he was first defined and entitled and renamed as 'Mahima Gosain.

Additional supporting Government records.

The Commission of Orissa writes to the Secretary to Government, Judicial Department in his letter No.402 Dtd.01.11.1881 while giving a report on the origin and growth of the Sect of Hindu dissentors and who profess to be the followers of Alekh as follows. This report was based on the reports of the Tehasildar Banki, Angul and the Manager of Dhenkanal. The report says :-

1. The founder of the Sect (Mahima Sect) is said to have been Mukunda Das . He lived for a long time in Puri as an Achari Vaishnab and was known as Dhulia Babaji.

About 30years ago he left Puri and came to Dhenkanal, one of the feudatory states of Cuttack where he selected as his dwelling place, the Kapilash hills, near shrine Mahadev. xx

During his Sojourn at Kapilash, he was known to be a devout worshipper of local idol and took much pains in improving the place by cutting Jungles, making gardens, looking of to the Bhog or sacred food of the idol and taking care of the pilgrims who visit the Hills periodically. This procured him the respect of the mother of late Maharaja of Dhenkanal who supplied his food. He gradually succeeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages and the popular belief that he was in secret communion with the idol and could successfully intercede with it on behalf of votaries.

The currency of this belief was further facilitated by the fact of his taking special care of the Sick people who resorted to Kapilash for the benefit of their health and being generally succeeded in getting it restored and his visiting the temple at the dead of the night while everyone had returned to rest.

5. After thus remaining at Kapilash for several years and finding that he had sufficiently established his reputation and the respect of the people, Mukunda Das left the place and began to preach that Mahadev and other idols worshipped by the Hindus were nothing else but stone and wood and that the worship of these destructable articles was useless and of no avail, that the creator of the Universe was Alekh or Mahima. Mahadeva for literary means glorious, a spiritual being without form, Omni-present and omniscient and that he alone could communion with him and get his prayer granted.

He exchanged his Kaupin (Waist cloth) and Kanthi (Wooden bead worn round the neck) the two distinct feature in the exterior of a Vaishnab and wore Kumbhipat (the bark of a tree called Kumbhi) to cover his nakedness."

X X X X

The following extract from the report of the Manager of Dhenkanal throw some light on the real sentiments of the Swami.

The man who was called Phalahari Gosain was afterwards designated "Mahima Gosain" and believed to be the incarnation of almighty God.

In the year 1874, while I was on tour in the interier of Dhenkanal, the founder of the Mahima or Alekh religion went with me from place to place and was with me for about a week and I also saw him on several other

occasions, but I never heard from him that he professed to be the creator of the world as his disciples and followers believed him to be. From what I heard from him, I concluded that he believed that the creator of the world is a spiritual being Omnipresent and omniscient without any form, whom he called "Mahima" and also "Alekh Pravu" and that he alone could communicate with the Alekh Pravu and get down what he wished.

He believed in the existence of the Hindu Gods and goddess and was telling that they were under his commands and that they were bound to obey whatever he wished him to do".



MAHIMA GOSAIN-GOVINDA BABA-BHIMA BHOI

Mahima Gosain attained his 'siddhi' or final realisation in the year 1862 at the Kapilash hills of Dhenkanal. Thereafter he started out on his missionary tour for spreading the message of Mahima Dharma among the people.

At Balasingha, near Boudh, he met Govinda Baba who later became one of the strong believers of the Mahima gospel and one of his closest associates. This meeting between Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba is considered to be a great event in the history of Mahim religion. After this the Mahim faith got organised into a popular movement.

It appears that, from Balasingha (Boudh) both Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba went to the ex-state Rairakhole where they met Bhima Bhoi in a samall village called Kankanapada.

Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba both were aware of the poetic talents of Bhima Bhoi and made him conscious of his great potential genius. They inspired him to write and sing songs of the Mahima for upliftment of mankind. They taught Bhima Bhoi the principles of Mahima Cult.

Being inspired by the teaching of Mahima Gosain, Bhima Bhoi went on writing about Mahima Dharma till his end. This event took place in the year 1866. At that time Bhima Bhoi was sixteen years old.

The blessing of Mahima Gosain brought about a spiritual transformation in the life of Bhima Bhoi who now started composing a series of 'Bhajana' of exquisite beauty and great charm.

At the age of sixteen Bhima Bhoi gained reputation as a spokesman of the Mahima faith. The obvious advantage that he enjoyed was that, he had the presonal guidance of his Guru, i.e., Mahima Gosain. His writings are, therefore, the original source materials of Mahima cult. In order to arrive at a sensible and scientific approach to the religion the writings of the poet are second to none in being original, authentic and real.

It is quite necessary to mention here that, Bhima Bhoi had a talent for poetry and a command over the local tradition and the idiom and language of the local people even before his conversion to Mahima cult. This conversion led to an even greater range of ideas and themes and helped extend the horizons of his poetic vision and compositions. He had elements of a pastoral poet in him and was thoroughly conversant with the life styles and hopes and aspirations of the local people.

Bhima Bhoi was the first poet, i.e., "adikabi" of Mahima Cult. In his writings the concepts of Mahima Cult

were transformed from dry celebration into an emotional realisation and outpourings of the soul. His writings were more in the line of medieval mysticism than philosophical speculations. So they were more popular among the rural folk.

Mukunda Das alias Mahima Gosain

It is at Kapilash hills that Mukunda Das left Baishanavism and embraced Shaivism as reported in the news paper "Utkal Dipika" Part-II, Dt. 1,6, 1867 No.22. It is further reported in the same issue of "Utkal Dipika" that he was worshipping "Chandra Shekhar Shiva", the presiding deity of Kapilash.

It is reported in Utkal DipikaDt.01.06.1867 that one day he (Mukunda Das) heard a voice from sky and accordingly left the Sannyasa Dharma he practised and cut off his Jata. (matted hair).

It may be mentioned that Mahima Gosain attained Siddhi in the year 1862 A.D. at Kapilash.

It is recorded by Shri S.P.Sarma in his book "Three Years in Orissa" that "one Mukunda Das is the founder of a new faith, i.e., Mahima Cult". He writes, "Leader of the sect one Mukunda Das spent some time in Puri as Achari Vaishnava and established himself in Dhenkanl between 1840 and 1850, practised austerity in retreat and came out apostle a new faith".

After attaining Siddhi (1862), in the summer of 1863 Mahima Gosain reached Cuttack and in the bright fortnight of the month of 'Kartika' a ceremony called Mahima Puja or Balya Lila was celebrated with great pump at "Khuntuni" near Athagarh. It is said that at Khuntuni, the field near the mango grove extending over an area of about 400 acres was cleared for Mahima Puja or Balya Lila.

Bhagirathi Mahinda Bahadur, Raja of Dhenkanal supplied 21,420 earthen pots, each a maund and half in volume to keep the materials.

As per Bengal district Gazetters, Mahima Gosain came to Malbiharpur in Banki in the year 1864. It beame an important seat of Mahima religion and Mahima Puja was celebrated there with great zeal by the new converts.

The detailed account of the spread of the religion in and around Daruthenga, Damana, Patia, Andharua by 1864-65 may be seen in the History of Mahima Dharma by Biswanath Baba. In the detailed history of Mahima Dharma, there is reference to Mr. Madhusudan Das who, in course of his visit to Patia in 1864 in the company of his father happened to see the founder of the Mahima Cult. He had then passed the Entrance examination and his father Chowdhury Raghunath Das was an advocate at the Cuttack Court. He was also an advocate of Raja Raghunath Dev, ruler of Patia. Mahima Gosain had, on a Dola Purnimaday, arrived at Patia from Daruthenga. Mr. Das was greatly moved at the catholicity of this religious reformer in his religious out look, practice of the faith etc. He used to say later on that if the founder of the faith had been born in Punjab or Bengal and not in Orissa, he would have ranked with Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj and Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj. Mr. Das used to admit among learned dignitaries that the Mahima Cult is a great contribution of Orissa to the religious movement of the world.

The steps taken by Mahima Gosain for the spread of the religion soon turned into a movement, reacted adversely by the privileged classes. The Raja of Madhupur drove away the followers of this cult from his territory when they tried to enter there as reported in <u>Utkal Dipika</u>

Dt.06.09.73 Part-VIII issue no.36. It is also reported therein that the Brahmins of Jajpur had resolved in a meeting that they would not allow the spread of the doctrine of this cult in their locality.

The last scene

In 1873 some persons submitted representation before T.E. Revenshaw, the then commissioner of Orissa Division, complaining that Mahima Gosain was seducing the ladies of respectable families to become nuns of the Mahima Faith.

In 1874, a serious quarrel took place among the followers of Mahima Gosain at Malbiharpur leading to violence and bloodshed. This gave sufficient ground for Mr.Ravenshaw to send Rai Bahadur Harekrushna Das, the Asst. Superintendent of Police to arrest Mahima Gosain.

Rai Bahadur Harekrushna Das came to Dhenkanal with a police force to arrest Mahima Gosain. Hearing this, Mahima Gosain became annoyed and proceeded towards Keonjhar in order to evade arrest. But he fell seriously ill at Kirtanpur and subsequently carried in a doli by the followers to Madhi (modern Kamakshya Nagar) where he breathed his last in 1876 A.D. He was given samadhi on the 10th day of the bright fort-night of Falguna (February-March) in the year 1876 at Joranda near Dhenkanal. x x x

The followers of Mahima Cult say that Mahima Gosain had made his self-willed exit from the world in the year 1876 A.D. Biswanath Baba has an anecdote (Page 246-247 of History), "Mahima Swami was during his Sojourn halting at Kasipur Tungi. He spoke to devotees that some wicked persons from the ex-State areas could not tolerate the Divine sport and power and were in search of Mahima

Mahapravu on intimation to the state authorities. **They wanted to arrest him**. But whereever they went, the villagers reported to their query that 'He was in their village the previous night and they did not know his whereabouts." The wicked persons made a long and tedious search and Guru Gosain was then on the way from Kasipur.

At his sight, two of the wicked persons asked him in HIndu, 'who are you ?' 'I am the milkman of this Jungle'. Thus replied the Lord of the Universe in Hindi.

On the very spot, he concealed himself and the evil design of the enquiring persons proved futile. They could no longer recognise him."

It is mentioned in letter No.402 Dt.01.11.1881 of the Commissioner of Orissa Division addressed to the Secretary to Government Judicial Deptt. as follows :-

"In 1875, the Mahima Swami who was believed to be immortal died at Joranda in Dhenkanal and the Tungis together with the Goods they contained were sold as State property.

Most of the followers of the new faith finding that the Swamy was no better than an ordinary mortal disbelieved what he had inculcated and reversed to Hinduism with those of his disciples and followers and who had left their homes and friends and had been outcasted continued to practice new cult they had embraced.

At present (i.e., by 1881) there are only two places of worship in Dhenkanal, one at Joranda where the Mahima Swami died and was cremated and another at Mahalpara where Narasingha Das now lives.

The Kumbhipatias resort to the former and the Kanapatias to the later of those places. They are reported not to be in good terms with each other."

THE LAST 14YEARS (1862 TO 1876 A.D.) OF MAHIMA GOSAIN.

Mahima Gosain attained siddha in 1862 at the Kapilash hills near Dhenkanal and thereafter started his missionary tour to expound his new faith among the people.

He went to Balasingha (near Boudh) where Govinda Baba his close associate and disciple had established his Math or Seat of religious activities.

The meeting between Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba is considered to be a great event in the history of Mahima religions as this religion could be organised as a popular movement by the versatile Baba.

From Balasingha Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba went to Rairakhole and met Bhima Bhoi in the small Kandh village Kankadapada. The conversion of Bhima Bhoi into Mahima Dharma is another great event in the history of Mahima religion.

Mahima Gosain made the unknown Kandha boy conscious of his great potential genius and inspired him to sing songs of the Divine for upliftment of mankind. The cowherd boy Bhima Bhoi got his poetic faculty enkindled by the spiritual touch of Mahima Gosain and started composing lyrics and Bhajanas by spontaneous appeal. At an early age of 16 he was renowned as a great poet and philosopher and gathered round him a large followers through his inspiring songs.

Mahima Gosain preached his religion in the Districts of Cuttack, Puri, Ganjam and in the feudatory states of Dhenkanal, Athagarh, Hindol, Boudh, Sonepur as well as, in the districts of Sambalpur and Angul. He collected a large number of disciples all over Orissa.

He established a number of centres of Mahima Cult known as "Mahima Ashram" and "Alekh Tungi". He

established Mahima Ashrams and Tungis at places like Bramhapur and Ranjagola in Hindol, Angarbandha in Angul, Madhi, Jaka, Kasipur, Kateni and Joranda.

He held Mahim Mela(childrens festivals) at Malbiharpur in Banki, Baulpur in Dhenkanal.

Mahima Gosain recruited only Siddha Sadhus. As such Bhima Bhoi who was recruited by Mahima Gosain was taken as a Sadhu in the first pat of his life. Later on he was married to Arnapurna and was denied "Siddha Bana" by Mahima Gosain. Mahima Gosain breathed his last in 1876 A.D..

The last "Jaka Fair"

In 1875, in the month of Kartika on the full moon day, a fair was held at Jaka in Dhenkanal where a large number of followers of the Gosain assembled with rich presents including valuable clothes, silver, utensils. etc.

It is said that the Babaji or Swamy as he was also addressed, offered those presents to the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal and on his decline to accept them, they were openly burnt in the fire of the sacred Dhuni kept a live by religious mendicants.

It is further mentioned by the Tehasildar Angul in his letter No.513 Dt.12.08.1881 addressed to the Commissioner of Orissa, Cuttack that "the Fair was first arranged to be held at Angarbandha in Angul but was afterwards removed to Dhenkanal with the intention of receiving assistance from the Maharaja, who it is said, was great friend to the Mahima Swami and had patronised the spread of religion.

The Mahima Swami died in the month of Falgun following the fair."



SOME UNUSUAL INCIDENTS OF MAHIMA GOSAIN.

It is said by the followers of Mahima cult that Mahima Gosain appeared to people at different places in a same time.

He once restored life to a dead man, disappeared suddenly while walking in company, walked upon water and in the air (!) and miraculously took the bodily shapes of the tenfold incarnations of Lord Vishnu.

In Padpadma Hill of Khurda and in the village Sisupatna in Dalijoda, Mahima Swami had yogic sleep (trance) which continued for 21days at a stretch.

It is mentioned by Prof. S.Nath in his book 'Mahima Dharmadhara' (Page-17) as follows :-

"Though he had miracles at his easy command, he (Mahima Gosain) refrained from any such and strictly commanded his followers not to do so"



APPENDIX

- ☆ News item in "Utkal Dipika".
- ☆ Sevak Dated 2nd January 1884.
- ☆ George A.Grierson's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.
- ☆ Cultural Heritage of India Vol-IV, Page 388.
- ☆ Mukunda Das renamed as Mahima Gosain :-
  - i). Extract from Banki Tehasildar's letter No.131 Dt.06.08.1881.
  - ii) Extract from Babu Banamali Singh, Manager, Dhenkanal States letter No.40, Dt.08.10.1881
  - iii) Extract from the Commissioner, Orissa Division letter No.402 Dt.01.111881.
- ☆ Census of Mayurbhanj State 1931 Vol.I, Page 120-121 by Mohammad Laeequiddin.
- ☆ Records regarding an attack on the Jagannath Temple by some of the so called followers of Mahima cult on Ist March 1881.

☆ Bibliography

☆ Glossary of non-English terms

APPENDIX

NEWS ITEMS IN UTKAL DIPIKA

There are two news items published in the "Utkal Dipika" in Oriya, the first one is entitled 'The Spread of the New Religion' Dt.01.06.1867 and the second one is entitled 'Mahima Babaji' Dt.06.09.1873.

These two news items indicate the intensified efforts made by Mahima Gosain for the spread of the new religion after 1862 A.D. i.e., after his final realisation Siddhi.

The first news item i.e., 'The spread of the new Religion' is translated into English as follows :-

"A new Religious faith has started spreading from some ex-State areas adjacent to Cuttack. It is named as Mahima Dharma.

There was a Sanyasi living on fruits on the Kapilash hill in Dhenkanal. He first lived on fruits for some days, then on milk and atlast only on water and worshipped God Shiva.

He relinquished the Sanyas faith after cropping off his matted hair as directed one-day by the void.

Now he puts on bark and is engaged in spreading the religion.

In this cult there is no caste discrimination. Funeral rites and idol worship are forbidden. Only one Lord is to be worshipped. The founder of this religion is

completely free from greed and is most eager in feeding the people.

He and his disciples don't take food inside a house or in any pot made of bell-metal. They eat on the road in a broken earthen pot, whatever is offered by any person, irrespective of caste.

They build good large sized house in one place and feed 40 to 50 thousand people. They leave the spot after burning the houses whenever they so desire.

It is said that about 20 to 30 thousand people have resorted to the faith.

The residents of the places visited by the said Sannyasi are so obedient to him that they do not dare do other than what he commands. The people offer him whatever is desired.

'Sevak Dt.2nd January 1884

A monthly entitled 'Sevak' published from Cuttack from 1883 has a news item in its issue dated the 2nd January 1884. It is as follows :-

"A proposal has been published in 'Tattwabodhini' Patrika about the followers of the Mahima cult. It has been written there that the name of Mahima Gosain is Mukunda Das.

But the writer does not say how he came to know this. We have not succeeded, despite several efforts on our part, to know his name".

The news item further adds :-

'Mahima Gosain' was free from greed, because he used to construct Tungis one after another at huge expenditure and he burnt them by setting fire to them without any difficulty.

Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics

James Hastings (ed) Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol.I Edinburgh-1959.

George A.Grierson makes a note on 'Alekhnamis', 'Alekhgirs' or 'Alekhiyas' in the Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. He refers to a modern sect, akin to the Alekhiyas (Alekhiya, a Hindusthani derivation of alekh, meaning a follower of the unseeable) found in Orissa by about 1850 by one Mukunda Das, who was according to his followers an incarnation of Alekh himself.

Cultural Heritage of India Vol-IV Page 388

"Some minor sects of Bengal and Orissa"

The Natha Pantha and the Niranjani Pantha were prevaling in Bengal and Orissa before Kabir preached his philosophy. Later the school known as Mahima Pantha and Kumbhapatta pantha were founded in Orissa.

The later school founded by Mukunda Deva (Dasa, presumably a printing mistake) does not believe in the efficacy of temples and images or in the superiority of Brahmana. (From the mediaval mystics of north India by Khitimohan Sen, formerly Vice-Chancellor, Viswa Varati, Shantiniketan.)

Mukunda Das renamed as Mahima Gosain at Daruthenga

1. Banki Tahasildar in his letter No.131 Dt.06.08.1881 addressed to the Commissioner of Orissa Division, Cuttack has mentioned as follows :-

"At Daruthenga he (Mukunda Das) was first defined and entitled as Mahima Gosain and he discipled

Govinda Das who under the Mahima's orders discipled Narasingh Das of Killa Boudh; Bhagaban Das of Brahmana Basti, Sailo in killah Cuttack and Krushna Das and Bhaiga Das of Andharua and Madav Das, Krupasindhu Das and Achutananda Das of Daruthenga in Killah Khurda.".

2. Babu Banamali Singh, Manager of the Dhenkanal State in his letter No.40 Dtd.08.10.1881 addressed to the Supdt. of the Tributary Mahals, Orissa mentioned as follows in para No.5 of the said letter.

"The man who was first called Phalahari Gosain, was afterwards designated "Mahima Gosain" and was believed to be an incarnation of the Almighty God.

3. The Commissioner of Orissa Division in para-6 of his letter no.402 Dt.01.11.1881 addressed to the Secy. to Government, Judicial Dept.. has mentioned as follows :-

"From Kapilash, Mukunda Das went Puri where he remained for some time in mud hut on sand near the temple of Lokanath Mahadev.

He next came to Daruthenga in the Government State of Khurda in Puri, where he built an image (a place of worship) and commenced to propagate the new doctrine.

It was at this place (Daruthenga) that Mukunda Das deified and began to be addressed as "The Mahima Gosain".

CENSUS OF MAYURBHANJ STATE 1931,

VOL-I, PAGE - 120-121

By : Mahammad Leeaquddin.

Kumbhipatias :- The Kumbhipatia sect appears to have first attracted notices about 1874. The leader of the sect at that time was one Mukunda Das who spent some

years at Puri as an Achari Vaishnab, and between 1840 and 1850 established himself at Joranda near the Kapilas hill in the Dhenkanal State. Then he led a life of austerity tending the sick pilgrims who came to the shrine. After leaving in retreat for many years, he appeared as the apostle of a new Faith. He proclaimed that the idols worshipped by the Hindu were merely stone and wood and that the worship of such destructive articles was of no avail. The creator of the Universe was Alekh or Mahima, a spiritual being without form, omnipresent and omniscient and the road to salvation lay in his worship. The former of these two names the inexpressible or indescribale while the latter signifies 'glorious', Mukunda himself was known as the Mahima Guru or Mahima Swami and his disciples as the Kumbhipatias, because, they like Mukunda Das himself used the bark of Kumbha or yellow cotton tree (Cochlosperum Bossypium) to cover their nakedness. He also denounced the caste system and would eat food cooked by any one except a Raja, a Brahman, a Bhandari, and a Dhoba. The Raja because he was responsible for the sins committed in the State, the Brahman because he accepted gifts from sinful persons, the Bhandari because he shaved sinners and the Dhoba because he washed their clothes. He would not enter any body's house but would take his food on the public road in a broken earthen pot. He moved about from village to village, never staying more than one night at one place. He taught his disciples and followers to bathe early in the morning and to make obeisance to Alekh at sunrise and at sunset, turning their faces to the Sun and prostrating themselves seven times in the morning and five times in the evening. He also enjoined them not to eat anything after Sunset and before sunrise and not to take any medicine in case of illness. He died in 1875 and was buried at Joranda in Dhenkanal. As he was regarded as an incarnation of the deity and believed to be immortal, his death came as a

shock to his followers. Some renounced the new faith, but others remained faithful and fresh life was given to the cult by a new leader called Bhima Bhoi born about 1855 who belonged to a poor Khanda family in Sonepur. Bhima Bhoi began his life in his boyhood as a cattle herd and though born blind and unable to read and write he was possessed of considerable natural powers and had no small poetical ability. On attaining maturity, he began to compose verses in the form of prayers to the deity which his followers regarded as inspired and committed to writing. These verses are in easy flowing Oriya and it is said that their style would do credit to scholar. In his youth he became a follower of Mukunda Das and on the latter's death became one of the leaders of the Sect. His disciples increased rapidly in numbers, especially in Sambalpur where men of all classes and castes except the Brahmans embraced the new Faith. In 1880, Bhima Bhoi signalled his crusade by an outrage committed in the Jagannath Temple, inspired by the belief that if the image of Jagannath was destroyed, it would convince the Hindus of the futility of their religion and they would embrace the true faith. In obedience to his command, a body of Kumbhipatias mostly residents of Sambalpur marched to Puri and tried to break into the shrine of Jagannath which led to a struggle in which one of them was killed. Some of his followers fell away, partly on account of this failure and partly because of the conduct of Bhima Bhoi in causing a woman with whom he consorted to become pregnant. Bhima Bhoi eventually died in 1895 at Khaliapalli in the Sonepur State which is a centre of the Cult.

One section of this sect, reported from Puri is said to be distinct from other sections, but their doctrines seem much the same. Their founder is Artatran Das who flourished about 80 years ago.

The estoteric faith of the sect according to the enquiries made by Mr. B.C.Majumdar of Sambalpur, comprises the following doctrines.

The Soul of the father is reincarnated in the son. To attain salvation, one should avoid rebirth. It is the propensity to procreate that makes man sinful. Perfection is attained only when one is free from all sexual desires. To obtain this result, the Kumbhipatias have to give themselves up every morning to absorbed contemplation on the organs of generation maintaining perfect detachment from sexual feeling. At first, in several respects there appeared the traces of Buddhism in his new cult. Bhima Bhoi himself called his Guru the Mahima Swami, an avatara of Buddha and several indications of a Buddhistic belief have been brought to light by Mr. Nagendranath Basu in his book Modern Buddhism in Orissa, but with reference to the doctrines which the Kumbhipatias hold relating to the organs of generation by which they say the unseen power of God is manifested, the view has been held that they are phallic rather than Buddhististic. The present day enquiries made by Mr. Anderson an official of the Dhenkanal State as reported go to show that the doctrines of the founder of this Faith are mutatis mutandis in conformity with the Hindu scripture' and that the present leaders consider themselves to be "Hindu with the exception that they don't worship idols and forms".

According to Mr. Anderson the followers of this cult are divided into classes 1). Kumbhipatias, 2)Kanapatias, 3). Grihi. The first are those Sanyasis who have attained that stage of Development which entitles them to wear bark, the second are Sanysis who simply have Kaupins and the third class are men living as householders but professing

Alekh Dharma. Mr. Anderson thinks that the doctrines taught by Mahima Swami are excellent in themselves but they fail to gain wider acceptance oweing to their unsympathetic and disorted presentation by ignorant disciples!

Records regarding an attack on the Jagannath Temple on Ist March 1881

In the official records one important event has been recorded regarding an "Attack on the Jagannath Temple" by some of the so called followers of Mahima cult. The incident occurred on the Ist March 1881.

The rioters being inhabitants of Sambalpur, the Chief Commissioner of the Central provinces was asked to favour the Lieutenant Governor with information regarding their place of residence, habits and pursuits.

In connection with this incident, the Commissioner of Orissa called for reports on the Sect, from Banki, Angul, Dhenkanal which furnish a good view of the dissemination of the Sect, already surprisingly large.

The manager of the Dhenkanal State reported that he had accompanied Mahim Gosain for a few days in 1874 and he appears to have been impressed by his personality. Interesting is the report from Angul too, which lays stress on a direct effect of the Social-ethical engagements of the Sect, commanding which, it is mentioned that the "Pana" a notorious caste of the thieves, had given up their hereditary profession under the influence of the new religion.

The letters of the Tehasildar Banki, Angul, the Manager of Dhenkanal State etc. are reproduced for reference.

Year 1881

No.1862/96 Chief Commissioners' Office, Central Province.

From : F.C.Berry Esquire C.S.

Officiating Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner.

To The Officiating Under Secretary to the Government, Bengal, Judicial, Political and Appointment Department, Calcutta.

Dated Nagpur the 23rd May 1881.

Sir,

With reference to your letter No.1494 J of the 4th ultimo, and annexures as marginally noted No.96 Dt. the 19th March I am directed to submit for 1881, with annexures the information of his honour the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, copy of a letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur containing a brief account of 'The Sect of persons who call themselves the followers of Alekh.

I am to add that the further information promised by the Deputy Commissioner regarding these people will also be supplied when received.

Sd/- F.C.Berry.

Officiating Assistant Secretary.

Copy of a letter No.1612 Dated 3rd May 1881 from W.A.Nraham Equirss, officiating Deputy Commissioner, Sambalpur to the Commissioner, Chhatishgarh Division.

With reference to your No.2570 of the 28th ultimo, I have the honour to enclose extract from my preliminary census report giving some information about the people in question. I am making further enquiries, and will duly communicate the result. Extract from letter No.1145 Dt. Ist

April 1881 from the Deputy Commissioner, Sambalpur to the Deputy Superintendent, Census, Central Province.

X X X X X

There is a peculiar Sect of Hindu dissenters in this district, known as Kumbhipatias. Their religion also known as that of Alekh appears to have originated in Angul and Dhenkanal Tributary States attached to the Cuttack District, about the year 1866.

The name of the Founder of the religion appears unknown, and its followers state that he is a spiritual being without form, who lives in heaven.

His chief disciple Govinda Das is dead, another known as Narsingh Das has erected his Math(Temple) in Banki. The Kumbhipatias have another temple in Malbahar in Banki. They have a book called 'Malika' which contains predictions.

They are divided into 3 sects, the Kumbhipatia Goseins, the Kanapatia Goseins, and Ashritas. The 2 former sects have renounced the world, the followers of the one do not eat with those of the other.

They appear to be of dirty habits, not washing after eating themselves and not bathing at all.

The third sect called, 'Ashrita' do not renounce the world, nor deem celibacy essential nor are they turned out of caste. They look upto the other 2 sects as their gurus or spiritual guides and follow their religion. They bathe in the early morning and all 3 sects turn their faces towards the Sun, at time of rising and setting and prostrate themselves 5 to 7 times. They do not eat after Sun set. Each sect has a separate temple or place of prayer. They recognise 'Bhagabat' one of the Hindu religious books but interpret it differently to the Hindus. They do not respect the images of the Hindu Gods, arguing that as no one has ever seen the Supreme being it is impossible to form his image. They believe in the existance of 33 crores of Hindu Gods and Goddesses but do not obey them, asserting that it is not necessary to obey the servants but only the master.

Their worship consists of prayer and praise to the immortal being whom they call Alekh.

I am not aware of any other sect of Hindu dissenters.

No.2473 J Copy forwarded to the Commissioner of the Orissa division with reference to the correspondence ending with his letter No.96 Dt.19th March last, and with a request that he will be so good as to make enquiries regarding the origin and growth of the Sect and report the result.

By order of the Lieutt.

Governor of Bengal. Sd/- Illegible,

Under Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Cuttack, Judicial the 13th June, 81.

No.131 Banki Tehasil Office.

The 6th August, 1881.

To The Commissioner of Orissa Division, Cuttack.

Sir,

With reference to your No.224 of the 23rd June last I beg to submit an account of Alekh religion as far as is known in Banki.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Yours most obedient servant, Tehasildar.

Account of the Alekh religion.

The Alekh religion did not originate in Banki. It is said to have originated on the Kapilash Hill in Dhenkanal.

There was a hermit there named Mukund Das. He

was at first an 'Achari Boishnaba' believing in and worshipping Hindu deities. He is said to have lived for some time only drinking water and then for nearly 12 years only drinking milk and to have worshipped idols while he continued as 'Achari Boishnab' till about the year 1856.

When he despaired and people pecked stones at him, threw off his cloth Koupin, (or rag to cover nakedness and Kanthi' (or string of beads worn round the neck), wore Kumbhipat i.e., the pat or pack of a tree called 'Kumbhi' to cover his nakedness, left Kapilash, went to Poore where he lived for about 6 years at Loknath pada on the sand near Loknath Mahadeb temple in mud hut which he made there. He then came to Daruthenga in Khurda where he build a house (worth about 150 Rs.) and stayed there now and then but mostly moved here and there.

At Daruthenga he was first defined and entitled and renamed Mahima Gosain and he discipled Govinda Das who under the Mahima's orders discipled Narsingh Das of Killah Boud, Bhagabat Das of Brahman basti. Sailo, in zillah Cuttack and Krushna Das and Bhaig Das of Andharua and Madan Das, Krupasindhu Das and Achutananda Das of Daruthenga in Killah Khurda. These disciples went in several directions to propagate the religion. The Mahima Gosain burnt the houses at Daruthenga and built a house in the jungle near the Andharua village. After some time he burnt that house and went and built a large house at Damna near Oadhkhin in Killah Patia. Subsequently he burnt that house and went and built a house a Khuntuni in Killah Athagarh. There he gave a great feast and attracted the general faith and worship of the common people and the reputation of his excellencies spread far and wide. After some time he pulled down the houses at Khuntuni and after wandering about in several directions for some time he came to Malbeharpur in Killa

Banki in about 1866 and there built a very large house worth nearly 1000 Rs. He made a dhuni or great religion fire in the houses and leaving Narasingh das in charge of it roamed in Dhenkanal, Angul, Talcher and other Killahas and again visited killah Khurda and there came with a thread 300 feet long to the Dhuni house at Malbeharpur and stopped and ate at a distance of 300 hats from round the house and gave some feasts on the banks of the Marsh called Ainspa. Numerous persons wore kumbhipat in the Dhuni house under the Mahima orders and they went to several parts of Orissa and to the Sambalpur and Ganjam districts to propagate the creed. This went on for about 7 years. During these period large numbers of domestic men and women adopted the faith and became devoted to the Mahima and were entitled 'Ashritas' (i.e., protected.).

In 1869 the Mahima Gosain demolished the Dhuni at Malbeherpur and built another house of 84 hats worth about 2000 rupees and after building several other houses and destroying them he left the Banki Killah and rambled and built houses in Dhenkanal, Angul, Talcher, Keonjhar and other Killahas.

It was perhaps in Dhenkanal that the use of Kanapat (i.e., wearing a rag to cover nakedness) began.

About 4years before the Mahimas' coming to Banki, Govinda Das died at Daruthenga, About 1873 a Kumbhipatia got mad, committed homicide and was transported for life and Narasingha Das having abatted the offence was imprisoned for a year in the Cuttack Jail. On his release from prison he came to Dhenkanal and he is still at Mahulpal in that Killah.

In 1875 the Mahima Gosain died in his house at Joranda in the same Killah. After his death the houses left at Malbeharpur and Dhenkanal were sold by Government as inter State property. The followers of the religion believed that the Mahima Gosain was divine and immortal but when

he died like a mortal man, the faith of the people in his religion gradually declined and numerous 'Ashritas' reverted to their former religion.

The kumbhipatias and kanapatias are ascetics. They are of very dirty habits. The kumbhipatias neither bath nor clean their teeth though they wash after ensuing themselves.

The Kanapatias bathe but to not wash their teeth.

Both classes take food cooked by people of all castes but they don't eat with each other. They do not take their meals within houses or from plates but in the open air and from earthen pots.

The 'Ashritas' continue in their society and caste. They regard the 'Kumbhipatias' as their Gurus or spiritual guides and follow their religion. They bathe early in the morning. All the three sects turn their faces towards the Sun at its rise and set and prostrate themselves 7 times to 'Alekh'. They misinterpret Bhagabat so as to show that the Hindu religion is false. They do not obey or believe in the Hindu deities. They only worship the supreme being whom they call 'Alekh'.

There are now no Kumbhipatias or Kanapatias in Banki. They are mostly in the Central provinces. There are a very few Ashritas in Banki but they do not now openly and firmly profess the religion. They have almost lost their faith in it and have only kept up some forms of it as they have not the moral courage to relinquish it entirely and return to their former religion. In fact they never learnt or understood what it really was but adopted it and had blind faith in it in ignorance being misled by the show of extraordinary qualities which they took to be super human and divine in Mahima Gosain. The religion has thus almost died out in Banki.

Banki Sd/-

6th August 1881 Tehasildar.---

No.513

Angul Tehasil Office.

the 12th August 1881.

From : The Tehasildar of Angul.

To The Commissioner of Orissa. Cuttack.

Sir,

With reference to your memo No.224 Dt.23rd June last and enclosures, I have the ' honour to submit my report regarding the Origin and growth of a sect of Hindu called 'Alekh' or 'Mahima'.

2. The founder of the Sect called 'Mahima Swami' in this quarter, is said to have lived at first in the Regulation districts and for a long time at Puri when he was called 'Dhulia Baba' a name applied to a sect of Hindu ascetics who besmear their body with ashes.

In his second stage, he is said to have been lived in 'Kapilash' a celebrated holy place in Dhenkanal where he was known as '<u>Phalahari Babaji</u> ', that is to say an ascetic who lives on fruits. This stage of his life extended for 12 years after which he was designated '<u>Kshiranira Payi</u>' or an ascetic who lives on milk and water only for a period of another 12 yeas.

During this third stage he used to visit the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal whose mother is said to supply milk as token of respect towards him.

3. Towards the end of this 3rd stage he commenced to preach the new principle of Alekh or Mahima who is an invisible being without form and the only master of the Universe.

He first built a 'Tungi' or place for worship at Daruthenga a place in Dhenkanal which was after wards abandoned and removed to Malbeharpur in Banki which is

considered now the sacred place among the followers of Mahima and where the truth of Alekh or Mahima appears to have been discriminated about the year 1866. The Mahima Swami had established a sacred pile of Fire which is called 'Anahata Dhuni' or inextinguishable fire and which was the only altar for worshipping Mahima.

4. The followers of Alekh or Mahima seem to have been divided into 3 sects, viz., the Kumbhipatias, the Kanapatias and the Ashritas.

The former two have renounced the world and deem celibacy essential, the males amongst them are called 'Babas' or Fathers and the Females ' Matas' or Mothers. The only difference that is found amongst these two classes is that the Kumbhipatias use barks of a tree called 'Kumbhi' for their dressing where as the Kanapatias pieces of rags.

They beg from door to door and are accustomed to take their food only in day time at an open place beside a public place. They have no distinction of caste nor they have any objection to beg boiled rice which they call 'Bhikhya' from any man excepting the Raja, the Brahmins and the Washerman who they consider the only sinful beings in the world. The Raja being responsible for the sins committed in his estates, the Brahmins being the spiritual guide, accept all sorts of offerings which is called 'Dan' or gift and the washerman who washes dirty cloths of the people owns the sin of others and is always impure. They are also not accustomed to live at any place for more than a day or to beg twice from one house.

They are prohibited by their principles not to wash their teeth or to bathe, but they all preserve big matted hairs which are called 'Jatas'.

They turn their heads towards Sun at the time of rising and setting and lay prostrate down for several times which is the mode prescribed for saluting Alekh or Mahima and begging his shelter.

5. The 3rd sect viz, the 'Ashritas' do not renounce the world nor do they deem celibacy essential. They look upon the other two sects as their 'Guru' or spiritual guides. They bathe generally early in the morning and wash their teeth by means of cow-dung which, they say, they have been allowed by 'Mahima Swami'. They also don't keep malted hairs nor are seen to use Kumbhipata' or 'Kanapata' like the other two sects, but use red clothes which are called 'Kasa' or 'Gairika Basan' like the Brahmachari or Jogis amongst Hindus. They do not observe any Hindu ceremony or Festival nor do they obey the gods belonging to the Hindu pantheons though they seem to own their existence. They perform their marriage ceremony in a very simple manner upon the public road or thorough-fare where the bride throws a garland of flower round the neck of a bridegroom as token of offering herself to him.

When the friends and relatives of both the party call out loudly their 'Alekh Swami' to protect the new pair from the worldly career or life. It is also said that polygamy is prohibited among the Ashritas. For any misconduct or commitment of sin they penance by drinking cow dung solution. The Ashritas that are found in this Killahs are very few in number consisting of all classes of people. The principles of Mahima appear to have worked a very good example amongst the Panas of Angul who on accepting them seem to hate burglary, a practice not uncommon amongst the Hindu pana brethren. The Ashritas of Angul are also seen to have been out-casted or ex-communicated by their Hindu brethren and to have form a community of themselves. But they appear to observe caste distinction

as they never take their food from any one excepting from their fellow brethren.

6. The disciples of Mahima consider self denial and shelter in God as the source of their salvation. They have no ambition for any thing in the world nor they appear to possess self respect. Their principles appear in many ways to resemble with principles of 'Nirvana' amongst the Buddhists and 'Dasya Bhakti' among the followers of Chaitanya.

They appear to have no prescribed mode of worship but praise of God and prayer for his mercy. They recognise 'Bhagabat' one of the Hindu religious books, but interpret it in a different way to the Hindus. They have got a Malika, a book of predictions which treats of the incarnation or Alekh in the shape of Mahima Swami to save the world from the burden of sin and to show way towards salvation. Besides this they have got other sastras or religious books of their own which contains songs and dialogues interpreting the truth of Alekh.

Most of these songs etc. are said to have been composed by one 'Bhima Bhoi' a Khond by caste who was born blind but afterwards said to have been endowed with the powers of sight by the Mahima Swami.

They do not recognise the demise of the 'Mahima Swami' but say that he has disappeared and may at any time come to them as their saviour. It said that Nrushinga Das is the principle follower of Mahima Swami who is at present living in Dhenkanal. But he is not seen to have any superiority over the other Kumbhipatias who are equally respected by each other and by the Ashritas. In fact the followers of Mahima appear to have no leader after the death of Mahima Swami. They have been scattered in almost all the Garjats of Orissa, in the Chhatishgarh Division of theCentral Province in the regulation districts of Orissa and Ganjam. Among the Garjats their members are

more numerous in the estates of Dhenkanal, Banki, Hindol and Angul than elsewhere.

7. No authentic accounts as to the origin, birth place and previous life of Mahima Swami could be found among the religious works of the Mahimas. The Mahima Swami is said to have built 21 Tungis in the Estates of Angul, Banki, Dhenkanal and Hindol within the jurisdiction of which he used to preach his religion.

8. He is said to travel everyday from one tungi to another and would never stay at any place or beg his food or Bhikhya before reaching a Tungi. The relative distant of which were the limits of a days journey. On his arrival at every Tungi his feet were washed by his followers and ashritas with 'Saptamruta' being a mixture of milk, curd, sugar, honey, Sandal wood powder and Camphor differing from the Panchamruta of the Hindus by the addition of camphor and sandal, which they used to drink as something holy for their salvation.

In Angul there is a Tungi at Angarbandh which is at present repaired at Government expenses and reserved for the purpose of staying. The religion does not appear to be in progress in this quarter after the death of the Mahima Swami. Most of the disciples of his times have at present abandoned their principles and taken into the caste and community to which they formerly belonged. It is said that it has at present become more popular in the district of Sambalpur than anywhere else.

9. In the year 1875 on full moon (Purnima) day of the month of Kartika a fair was held at Jaka a place in Dhenkanal where a large multitude of the followers of Mahima had assembled They had brought with them various kinds of valuables and precious kinds of cloth etc. to present Mahima Swami who after their exhibition caused them to he burnt in the sacred pile of fire or Dhuni. It is

also said that the Swami had offered them to the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal who declined to accept.

The Fair was first arranged to be held at Angarbandha in Angul but was afterwards removed to Dhenkanal with the intention of receiving assistance from the Maharaja, who it is said, was great friend to the Mahima Swami and had patronised the spread of religion.

The Mahima Swami died in the month of Falgun following the fair.

I have the honour to be Sir

your most obedient servant.

Sd/-

Tehasildar.

No.40

From, Babu Banamali Singh,Manager of the Dhenkanal State,(Magistrate Dhenkanal.)

To, The Supdt. of the Tributary Mahals, Orissa.
Dated, the 8th October 1881, Dhenkanal

Sir,

With reference to your memo No.224 of the 23rd June last, I have the honour to submit the following report regarding the Origin and growth of the Sect called Kumbhipatiya.

2. The founder of the Sect came to Dhenkanal about 30years ago, He was then a follower of Hindu Religion and was of the Vaishnava Sect. He lived in the Kapilash Hill near the shrines of the Mahadev there for about 12 years. While there, he used to drink with only and did not take any other food and was called Phalahari Gosain.

During the time he was at Kapilash, he was a devout worshipper of the Mahadeva and took much pains in improving the place by cutting Jungles and making gardens and looking after the 'Bhog' of the idol and taking care of the pilgrims who went there.

The late Maharaja's mother had great respect for him and his food was supplied by her. He gradually succeeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages and it was believed by many that through his intercession they could get their objects fulfilled by the idol. Kapilas being a place naturally of good climate the sick people generally go there and succeed in restoring their health.

The Phalahari Gosain used to take great care of the sick people who went there and he used to go to the temple of the Mahadeva in the dead of night after everyone had gone to his bed. It is supposed that these circumstances created a belief in the mind of the people that he was in secret communication with the idol and could by intercession relieve them of their diseases.

3. After Thus remaining several years at Kapilash, when he found he had sufficiently established a reputation and secured the respect of the people, he left the place and openly gave out to the people that the 'Mahadeva' and other idols worshipped by the Hindus were nothing else than stones and wood and that the worship of these destructable objects was quite useless.

4. When he left Kapilash, he went towards Patiya and Khurda and made some disciples who went to different parts of the country and preached the new religion. A place of worship first established at Daruthenga in the Puri District and a few days after another house of worship called Tungi was built at Malbeharpur in Banki and gradually when the number of followers increased, many other

Tungis were built in almost all the Tributary states and in Sambalpur and the Cuttack District.

As far as I know, the followers of this religion are almost all ignorant and illiterate people of the lower class of the Hindu community who were induced to adopt the new religion by hopes of enjoyment if they followed and threats of perdition if they did not follow the precepts of the religion.

5. The man who was first called Phalahari Gosain was afterwards designated 'Mahima Gosain' and was believed to be an incarnation of the Almighty God. In the year 1874 while I was on tour in the interior of Dhenkanal, the founder of the Mahima or Alekh religion went with me from place to place and was with me for about a week and I also saw him on several other occasions, but I never heard from him that he professed to be the creator of the world as his disciples and followers believed him to be. From what I heard from him, I concluded that he believed that the creater of the world was a spiritual Being omnipresent and omniscient without any form whom he called Mahima and also Alekh Pravu, and that he alone could communicate with the Alekh Pravu and get down whatever he wished. He believed in the existence of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses but said that they were under his commands and that they were bound to obey whatever he wished them to do.

The Mahima Gosain who is the founder of the Alekh religion made Govinda Das his first disciple, This man went towards Sambalpur and spread the religion in that side.

A Tungi (Place of worship) was built at Malbehrapur and Narsing Das, the second disciple was placed in charge of it. This man with the assistance of other minor disciples spread the religion in the Tributary Mahals and in the Regulation Districts of the Orissa Division.

Thus in a few years, the Mahima Gosain succeeded in making many disciples and followers and on the days of full moon, thousands of men and women from distant parts were seen going to the Tungis at Malbeharpur and also at other places with bangy loads of Ghee, Sugar, Silk clothes, Silver and Brass utensils and many other valuable things.

7. At last, the founder of the religion who was believed to be over existent died, and the Tungis together with the goods which they contained were sold and most of the followers, finding that the Mahima Gosain was no better than an ordinary man, disbelieved what he had taught and came back to the Hindu religion. The disciples and followers who had left their homes and been out-caste could not go back to their families and were obliged to continue in the new life they had adopted.

Some of the followers also who did not renounce the world, but were special favourities still follow the Mahima Cult.

8. At present there are only two places of worship in Dhenkanal, one at Joranda where the Mahima Gosain died and was buried, and another at Mahalpara where Narisingh Das now lives. The Kumbhipatiyas go to Joranda and the Kanapatiyas to Mahalpara and these two sects are not in good terms with each other.

9. During the time the Mahima Gosain lived, the Kumbhipatiyas and Kanapatiyas were not considered as different sects.

A man who wished to adopt the new religion first became an Ashrita which means a dependant. In this state he was not required to leave his home or caste, Afterwards if he wished to renounce the world he was to eat with everybody without distinction of Caste and remain always at

one of the places of worship called Tungis. In this state he was allowed to wear cloth and was, therefore, called Kanapatiya. After remaining in this state for some time, if any of the Kanapatiyas was considered fit to be Kumbhipatiyas, the Mahima Gosain used to favour him with a Kumbhipat (bark of a tree called Kumbhi) and from that time he would never wear cloth but only the bark of Kumbhi tree.

10. The Kumbhipatiyas and Kanapatiyas do not bathe but wash after eating themselves and they do not eat after Sunset. They have no books of religion except a few songs in praise of the Mahima and Alekh which they sing when they meet together in the evening.

I have the honour to be

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant

Sd/- Banamali Singh.

Manager of the Dhenkanal State.

No.402 Dt.01.11.1881.

To, The Secretary to Government.,Judicial Department.

Sir,

With reference to your endorsement No.2473 J of the 13th June last I have the honour to submit the following report on the origin and growth of the Sect of Hindus dissenters who profess to be the followers of Alekh.

2. The founder of the Sect is said to have been Mukunda Das. He lived for a long time in Puri as an Achari Vaishnab and was known as the Dhulia Babaji....

3. About 30 years ago he left Puri and came to Dhenkanal one of the feudatory states of Cuttack, where he

selected his dwelling place, the Kapilash Hills, near Shrine Mahadev.

During the Ist twelve years of his residence at Kapilash, Mukund Das lived on fruits and accordingly known as the Phalahari Babaji.

The next twelve years was passed on milk and water which secured him congnomen of "Khira Nira Payi".

4. During his sojourn at Kapilash, he was known to be a devout worshipper of local idol and took much pains in improving the place by cutting jungles, making of gardens, looking of to the Bhog or sacred food of the idol and taking care of the pilgrims who visit the Hills periodically. This procured him the respect of the mother of late Maharaja of Dhenkanal, who supplied his food. He gradually succeeded in securing the respect of the people of the surrounding villages and the popular belief that he was in secret communion with the idol and could successfully intercede with it on behalf of the votaries.

The currency of this belief was further facilitated by the fact of his taking special care of the sick people who resorted to Kapilas for the benefit of their health and being generally succeeded in getting it restored and his visiting the temple at the dead of the night while every one had returned to rest.

5. After thus remaining at Kapilash for several years and finding that he had sufficiently established his reputation and the respect of the people, Mukunda Das left the place and began to preach that Mahadev and the other idols worshipped by the Hindus were nothing else but stone and wood and that the worship of these destructable articles was useless and of no avail, that the creator of the Universe was Alekh or (Mahima) Mahadev for literally

means glorious, a spiritual being without form, omni-present and omni-scient and that he alone could hold communion with him and get his prayer granted.

He exchanged his Kaupin (waist cloth) and Kanthi (wooden bead worn round the neck) the two distinction feature in the exterior of a Vaishnab and wore Kumbhipat (the bark of a tree called Kumbhi) to cover his nakedness.

6. From Kapilash Mukunda Das went Puri where he remained for sometime in about on the lands near the temple of Lokanath Mahadev.

He next came to Daruthenga in the Government State of Khurda in Puri where he built an Image (a place of worship) and commenced to propagate the new doctrine. It was at this place that Mukunda Das was defined and began to be addressed as "The Mahima Gosain". It appears that one Govinda Das was his first and Narsingh Das his second disciple. Others followed their example and in course of time all these followers dispersed on all sides for the propagation of the new doctrine.

Thirdly after a place of worship was established at Malbeharpur in Killa Banki, other places were opened in some other remaining feudatory states as well as in Sambalpur, Puri and Cuttack. At some of these places of worship, the Mahima Gosain gave large feasts which were numerously attended.

In 1875, in the month of kartika on the day of fullmoon, a fair was held at Jaka in Dhenkanal where a large number of followers of the Gosain assembled with rich presents including valuable clothes, silver utensils etc. It is said that the Babaji or Swami as he was also addressed offered those presents to the late Maharaja of Dhenkanal and on his declination to accept them, they were openly burnt in the fire of the sacred Dhuni fire kept live by

religious mendicants. Thus in a few years the Mahima Gosain succeeded in making many disciples and followers and on the days of the full moon, thousands of men and women from distant parts of the country might have been seen wandering their way to the Tungis, with heavy loads of Ghee, Sugar and the valuable presents.

It is said that at present the new faith is more popular in Sambalpur and may other districts. It is confined mostly to the ignorant and illiterate people of the lower classes of the Hindu Community who were, it is said, induced to adopt the new religion by hopes of enjoyment if they followed and threats of perdition if they did not follow its precepts.

7. The disciples of the Mahima Swami incalculated self-denial and resignation the God as the sources of Salvation. They do not aspire of the world greatness or pleasures, extreme humility is one of their characteristics.

They have no prescribed modes of worship except praise of God and prayer for the mercy. They recognise the Bhagabat, but interprete in a different way from the Hindus. They have a Malika which treats of the incarnation of Alekh in the shape of Mahima Swamy to redress the world from sin and to indicate the way to salvation.

Besides this, they got another book containing songs and dialogues interpreting the truth of Alekh. Most of those songs are said to have been composed by Bhima Bhoi, a Kandha, who is said to have been born blind and obtained suddenly with sight of the Mahima Swami.

8. The following extract from the report of the Manager of Dhenkanal throw some light on the real sentiments of the Swami.

"The man who was first called the "Phalahari Gosain" was afterwards designated Mahima Gosain and believed to be the 'incarnation of the almighty God'. In the year 1874, while I was on tour in the interior of Dhenkanal,

the Founder of the Mahima or Alekh religion went with me from place to place and was with me for about a week and also saw him on several other occasions, but I never heard from him that he professed to be the creator of the world as his disciples and followers believed him to be. From what heard from him, I concluded that he believed that the creator of the world is a spiritual being Omnipresent and omniscient without any form, whom he called "Mahima" and also "Alekh Pravu" and that he alone could communicate with the Alekh Pravu and get down what he wished. He believed in the existence of the Hindu Gods and goddess and was telling that they were under his commands and that they were bound to obey whatever he wished him to do".

9. The followers of the Alekh are divided into 3 Sects (1) The Kumbhipatiyas (2) The Kanapatiyas (3) The Ashritas.

The first two have renounced the world and deem celibacy essential.

The males are called Babas and females Matas. The different between them being that a Kumbhipatia wears the bark of the Kumbhi tree and Kanapatias pieces of rag. They beg from door to door, have no distinction of caste and take their food only during the day time at an open place on public road. They eat food cooked by people of any caste except the Raja, A Brahman and a Washerman, whom they consider as sinful beings in this world. The Raja, as he is responsible for the sins committed in his state, the Brahmana as he accepts all sorts of gifts from sinful persons, and the washerman as he washes sinful people's dirty clothes. They are not accustomed to live at any one place for more than a day or to beg there from the same house. They wear long matted hair and also do not bathe. They turn their heads towards the sun at the time of rising and setting and prostrate themselves several times to beg shelter and mercy of the Alekh Swami.

The Ashritas do not forsake the world nor do they deem celibacy essential. They bathe generally early in the morning and clean their teeth with cowdung. They do not wear long hair nor do they use Kumbhipat or Kanapata like their conferes, but use 'Gerua Basana' or Cloth coloured with Geru or red earth like the Brahmachari of the Hindus. They don't observe any Hindu ceremony or festival neither do they respect Gods of the Hindus. They perform their marriage ceremony in a very simple way by the side of a public road, a thoroughfare. The bride puts a garland of flower round the neck of his bride groom in token of offering herself to him and her friends and relatives of both bonds call upon their Alekhswami to protect the new pair in their career through out life. Polygamy is prohibited among the Ashritas. For any misconduct an offender is made to do penance by drinking a solution of cowdung. The Ashritas consider the other two sects as their Gurus or spiritual guides. The Tehasildar of Angul reported that the new faith of Mahima has brought a change for their out turn. Panas of that Killah who have accepted the new faith regard theft with abhorrence.

10. In 1875, the Mahima Swami who was believed to be immortal died at Joranda in Dhenkanal and the Tungis together with the Goods they contained were sold as state property. Most of the followers of the new faith finding that the Swami was no better than an ordinary mortal disbelieved what he had inculcated and reversed to Hinduism with those of his disciples and followers who had left their homes and friends and had been outcasted continued to practice new cult they had embraced.

11. At present there are only two places of worship in Dhenkanal, one at Joranda where the Mahima Swamy died and was cremated and another at Mahalpara where Narasingh Das now lives. The Kumbhipatiyas resort to the former and the Kanapatiyas to the later of those places.

They are reported not to be in good terms with each other.

During the life time of Mahima Gosain the Kumbhipatiyas and Kanapatiyas were not regarded as distinct sects. Any person who wished to adopt the new religion first became an Ashrita which literally means protected. He was not required to leave his house and friends. Afterwards if he wished to forsake the world he was required to eat with every person without distinction of caste and to remain at any of the places of worship, called Tungi.

In this state he was allowed to wear cloth and was called Kanapatiya. If after that any of the Kanapatiya was considered fit to be Kumbhipatiya, the Mahima Swamy favoured him with Kumbhipat of the Kumbhi Tree and from that time he was prohibited to wear clothes.

The follower of the Mahima Swami appear to have now lessen after his death. They are scattered throughout the Garjats of Orissa in the Chhatishgarh Division of Central Province, in the regulation district of Orissa and in Ganjam. the adjourning district of Madras Presidency, The system has how ever taken most in Sambalpur district than elsewhere.

Commissioner of Orissa

Cuttack.

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GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH TERMS USED IN MAHIMA DHARMA & BHIMA BHOI WORKS

Abadhuta	Wandering Mendicant.
Alekh	Unwritten, indescribable
Anakara	Without form
Anama	Without name
Anadi	Having no beginning
Ananta	Endless
Atha Bhajana	8 Bhajanas of Bhima Bhoi
Ashrama	Resting Place.
Ashrita	To remain sheltered
Bhajana	Devotional Song
Balkala	Bark of a tree, Bark of KumbhiTree (Carexoya Arborea)
Barada	Made of a single leaf of the palm tree for Protection against Sun and Rain

Bana	The piece of cloth (or balkala) used on the head by Sadhus on their journey.
Badi	Stic
Baba	Sadhus addressed as baba.
Bibhuti	Ashes of Dhuni
Bairagi	A devotee who has renounced the world
Bhakta	Devotee
Bhakti	Devotion
Brahma muhurta -	The time in the morning and evening respectively before sun-rise and immediately after sun-set.
Chautisha	The style of poetical composition using the thirty four letters from 'Ka' to 'Ksha' serially at the beginning of each stanza.
Dasa -	A title to a Sadhu on being initiated to the Sadhu order
Dharma	Duty, Prescribed code of conduct
Dhuni	Sacred fire
Dhuni Mandira	Temple where dhuni is burnt
Diksha	Initiation
Fakadia	Bairagi
Gahania	Accompanying devotees
Geru	Earth of Safforn colour
Gomaya	Cowdung of She-calf
Ginee	Cymbal
Guru Purnima -	The 14th day of the fullmoon fortnight or the shukla chaturdasi.

Jatta	Matted hair on the head.
Janana	Entreating prayer.
Kasa	Saffron coloured with "gerumati."
Khanjani	Tambourine - a musical instrument
Laya	Deep concentration
Mahima	Ultimate Reality, Glory.
Maya	Illussion
Nirguna	Without attributes
Nirakara	Without form
Nirbikara	Without discrimination
Niranjana	Pure or without support
Niti	Principles, practice of duties
Parama brahma	The supreme reality or Brahma
Sadhana	Practice
Sharana	Surrender
Sadhu	The holyman, ascetic
Sanatana	Eternal
Shunya Brahma	Brahma existing without form and attributes
Shunya	Void.
Tungi	Resting place for Sadhus.